

# Fighting Germs in the Workplace

Sometimes we get sick of working, but what about when we get sick at work (or school)? Since the office is filled with surfaces that everyone shares, germs can easily spread through cross-contamination—the transfer of germs from one surface, food or person to another. The average adult catches two to four colds a year, resulting in millions of lost workdays. To help you stay healthy in the office, follow these simple tips:

## Handwashing

- Proper handwashing is the best way to avoid spreading germs. Rub your hands together with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands thoroughly and dry them completely using clean paper towels to help wipe up and throw away germs.

## Work Spaces

- Help remove germs in your personal work environment by wiping surfaces frequently with paper towels and disinfectant for added protection. The phone, keyboard, computer mouse and doorknobs are surfaces that are important to keep clean since they are frequently touched by you and your co-workers.

## Office Supplies

- Keep items like pencils and pens out of your mouth. Germs that are present on these items can easily spread to your hands and mouth, potentially making you sick.
- The fax and copier as well as other communally shared equipment can expose you to germs from many people. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth when you come into contact with any of these areas. Proper handwashing throughout the day and especially before eating can help reduce your risk of becoming sick.

## Sick Days

- Cover your mouth and nose with disposable paper products when sneezing or coughing. Use paper tissues, towels or napkins to help prevent germs from spreading to your hands.
- Your cold is most infectious during the first few days. If possible, stay at home during this time to avoid exposing your co-workers to your germs.
- Since a cold or flu may be contagious for as long as 5-10 days after you first experience symptoms, be especially aware of proper hygiene practices during this time. Keep in mind that germs can easily spread because of cross-contamination in close quarters.

## Kitchens

- The sponges and dishcloths in your office kitchen can harbor billions of germs. Instead, use wet paper towels and soap to wash utensils and coffee cups. Then dry items with a disposable paper towel to avoid contaminated drain boards.

- Use paper towels to wipe the tops of canned goods and soda and juice cans to help remove potentially contaminating microorganisms before you open them.
- All produce should be rinsed and wiped with paper towels or napkins to help remove germs before eating. Laboratory tests show that rinsing an apple with water may only remove approximately 75% of contaminating germs, while rinsing and drying with a paper product can remove up to 99% of the germs.
- Do not share cups and utensils with others, as sharing these items can potentially spread harmful germs.