

Beware of germs lurking on your desk

January 6 2012, By Katie Pence

The public health message about getting a flu shot is drilled into us at this point, and this far into the season, everyone should have already have fulfilled their duty and received one.

Although the shot is usually effective, that doesn't always keep us safe from the bacteria and germs that cause other uncomfortable illnesses, like a cold or even pneumonia, which has made its rounds this season.

"Additionally with the cold weather, we're beginning to 'hide' indoors, both at work and at home, surrounding ourselves with stale, warm air, which can carry germs, and putting ourselves in the center of germ hot spots that we may or may not recognize," says Sri Murthy, MD, UC Health primary care physician who sees patients in West Chester.

Murthy says there are steps to avoiding illness this winter, and it starts with one simple habit.

"Wash your hands," she says. "Washing your hands before eating, during food preparation, after bathroom use, after touching surfaces in common areas and/or after blowing your nose or sneezing greatly reduces the amount of germs on your hands and prevents the spread of illness."

She adds that illness-causing germs may also be lurking in places you might not often think about.

According to an American Dietetic Association and ConAgra Foods Home Food Safety program survey, 27 percent of people eat breakfast at

their desks, 62 percent eat lunch there and 50 percent snack there.

A study by the University of Arizona found the typical worker's desk has hundreds of times more bacteria per square inch than an office toilet seat. In addition, desks, phones and other private surfaces are also prime habitats for the viruses that cause colds and [flu](#).

"These findings are disturbing, but by practicing simple office hygiene—like washing your hands, cleaning your desk with antibacterial cleaner weekly, properly washing any reusable eating utensils, and finally, getting out of the office every once in awhile for lunch or just for a quick walk—can help," Murthy says.

"After all, some studies have shown that a regular exercise program can boost the immune system—and getting away from your desk may be good for your mental health as well."

Murthy says it's inevitable that you are going to be around people who predispose you to illness—for example, that hacking and coughing officemate—but sticking to office hygiene as well as general hygiene, getting plenty of sleep and eating right will help to keep you healthy.

"If you are the sick culprit in your workplace and your place of employment allows it, take leave to allow yourself time to recuperate," she adds. "In Ohio, we never skip a winter, and [germs](#) are present year-round. It's important to realize that being responsible for ourselves in everyday life is the first step in public health. Being aware of risks and taking the time to take the proper precautions is key in staying well."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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