

How to avoid germs in the gym

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With summer quickly approaching, many people are hitting the gym to get in shape. But can going to the gym actually be harmful to your health? One Baylor College of Medicine expert offers his tips on how to avoid germs in the gym.

"We all live with a certain amount of bacteria on our skin and that's normal, but when we exercise, we sweat and perspire and if we are using any equipment sometimes that sweat gets into the equipment or into the [locker room](#). That's where you would get an increased risk of possible infection," said Dr. Irvin Sulapas, assistant professor of family and community medicine at Baylor and primary care sports medicine physician.

There are multiple types of infections that people can catch at the gym, Sulapas explained, however, the most common one is a staph infection. He added that fungal infections also can be an issue because fungus tends to like living in warm, moist environments, and during a workout you can create that environment.

Treatment for a [staph infection](#) depends on its severity, but that warm compresses can help, he said. However, if the infection is causing pain, increasing in size or becoming redder, Sulapas recommends for you to see your physician to be evaluated because this can be a sign the [infection](#) needs to be treated with an antibiotic.

The No. 1 rule that gym-goers should follow to stay healthy is to wipe down the equipment before and after use, Sulapas said.

"The best thing you can use to wipe down gym equipment is some sort of alcohol or antibacterial wipes, which a lot of gyms already have. If wipes are not available, you can get a paper towel and mix some antibacterial soap and use that to wipe down the [equipment](#)," he said.

He also recommends never sitting on benches in the locker room naked, to not reuse towels, to bring your own towel if you can and to wear flip-flops in the shower. He added that if you are changing clothes, you should keep your dirty clothes in a separate compartment in your gym bag or put any sweaty clothes in a plastic bag in your gym bag so they do not mix with your clean clothes.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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