

Tips to staying germ-free at the gym

July 4 2024, by Robin Foster



Going to the gym is good for your overall health, but if you and the gym aren't practicing good hygiene you could still catch a nasty illness, an expert says.

"Good hygiene prevents sicknesses like a cold, influenza and even

salmonella, but cleanliness can also indicate that a gym is well-maintained overall, including the quality of equipment," said Melanie McNeal, a physical and occupational therapy manager at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "If hygiene rules are not followed you could get sick, get others sick or even have your membership cancelled."

When going to a new gym for the first time, there are a few key indicators to determine if hygiene is prioritized in the space:

- A lack of sanitary wipes for members or staff to wipe down equipment after use often means equipment is harboring unseen bacteria
- No signs posted asking members to clean equipment after using or no cleaning schedule posted suggests cleanliness is not a priority for the gym
- Other gym members using equipment and not cleaning it afterwards on a consistent basis can show there is not a culture of cleanliness
- Caked on layers of dust on equipment can indicate that equipment has not been cleaned in a while
- Lots of broken-down machines for extended periods of time can be due to a lack of interest from gym management in ensuring the space is well-kept

To do your part in practicing good gym [hygiene](#), there are several things you can do.

- Wear clean clothes each time you exercise; used clothes accumulate sweat and other bacteria that can cause foul smells or that can spread among gym members
- When approaching equipment, check to see if it is clean
- If you encounter a bench or other piece of equipment with wet residue from a chemical cleaning solution, allow it to dry on its

own. This residue indicates that the time it takes to kill all the bacteria is not complete

- After completing your exercise, take a wipe or solution sprayed on a napkin and wipe where your skin made contact with the equipment or where sweat dripped. Avoid directly spraying chemical solutions onto equipment, as excess moisture can cause damage
- If you choose to shower after a workout, McNeal always recommends wearing flip flops or other footwear that prevent contact between your feet and the floor, as these environments tend to be breeding grounds for mold, fungi and bacteria that can infect your feet

"Expect a clean gym and report concerns to management if you have any," McNeal said in a Baylor news release. "You should feel free to ask management about the cleaning schedule and always clean up after yourself. Leave [equipment](#) as you would want to find it when you walk up to it."

More information: The University of Utah has more on [good gym hygiene](#).

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Citation: Tips to staying germ-free at the gym (2024, July 4) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-07-staying-germ-free-gym.html>

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