

Office spaces are breeding grounds for cold and flu germs - here's how to avoid them

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Fighting off the flu yet again? If you're constantly bugged by bugs at work, you and your colleagues may actually be getting sick from one another.

Though the [Centers for Disease Control](#) doesn't keep stats on how common it is to pick up your co-workers' viruses, it's no secret that the workplace is the perfect environment for germs to live and flourish.

"When you're indoors and in close contact with your colleagues in the office, there is an opportunity for germs to be spread," says CDC spokesman [Tom Skinner](#). "There is no question that this is a significant way in which illness is past back and forth."

If we ever experienced a global pandemic

of flu, Skinner says, "social distancing would be one of the primary ways to prevent the spread of the flu."

But since we can't just stop going to work to keep our social distance from the sickies, here's a guide to the office hot spots where those harmful germs like to hide.

1. The bathroom. "Bathrooms tend to be hot spots, there is no question about that," says [Dr. Richard V. Lee](#), professor of medicine at the [University of Buffalo](#). "Some people don't wash their hands after going to the bathroom, and they don't dispose of tissues properly. The germs that cause illness are quite hardy and can survive for a long time on hard surfaces like sinks."

2. Door handles. "Most germs get passed around through hand to hand contact or touching something that's contaminated," says [Joe Rubino](#), a microbiologist who works for [Reckitt Benckiser](#), which makes [Lysol](#). "The contamination potential is huge on door handles."

3. Carpeting. "It looks and feels great but it's home to an untold number of bacteria," Rubino says. "The biggest problem with carpeting is mold, so the carpets at the

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office should be steam cleaned regularly with an industrial vacuum that has a filter.”

4. Communal coffeepot. People may not wash their hands before they brew or pour the java, says [Christine Turley](#), director of clinical research at the [University of Texas Medical Branch Sealy Center for Vaccine Development](#). “Since people can be contagious for about a day before they get sick, they leave germs on the pot and this is one of the hidden ways that people pass germs around,” she says.

5. Microwave oven. It’s great to have it to heat up your leftovers, but the control panel is constantly being poked by employees - who may be sick or else coming down with something. If you like to nuke your lunch, be sure to wash your hands immediately afterward in hot water with a lot of soap, Turley says.

6. Water coolers. They may be the quintessential “gathering place,” but they’re also a big threat to staying healthy, says [David Fowler](#), who works for Wellness Enterprises. “Water coolers are a rising concern,” he says. “Someone has to handle the jug and stick the jug into the cooler itself. And the little spout and the internal mechanism are breeding ground for

viruses and bacteria.” Plus, people are always shoving their plastic bottles right up to the spout to fill them - and for all you know, some of these people may be coming down with a flu the next day.

7. Shared phones and keyboards. “The data is limited, but it does seem as though phones and keyboards, when shared, can be a potential source of infection,” says [Dr. Joseph Rahimian](#), infectious disease specialist at [St. Vincent’s Hospital](#). “It certainly can’t hurt to disinfect them before you use them when you are sharing them.”


8. Pens and pencils. People tend to put them in their mouth and bite on them, Rahimian says. “This makes it very easy to transmit infection.” To avoid this, carry your own and don’t share with anyone else.

Want info on how to keep healthy in the workplace? The CDC offers lots of tips at www.cdc.gov.

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