

Computer Keyboard Germs: Your Fingers aren't the Only Things Dancing All Over Your Computer Keyboard

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by www.SixWise.com

Considering how often fingers come into contact with computer keyboards, it's not surprising that a new study published in *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* found some pretty gross results.

Twenty-five computers from the University of North Carolina's (UNC) burn intensive care unit, cardiothoracic intensive care unit and six nursing units were tested for bacteria. The researchers found that every computer keyboard was contaminated with two or more microorganisms.

You may be transferring two or more types of bacteria onto your fingertips while you type.

"Contamination of Keyboards is Prevalent"

The bacteria that was found was the type that could be detrimental to hospital patients:

- **All keyboards tested positive for a staph bacterium called coagulase-negative staphylococci.** This is one of the most common causes of bloodstream infections among those hospitalized.
- **80 percent of keyboards contained diphtheroids.** This bacteria represents a significant infection risk for those whose immune systems are weak, such as cancer and AIDS patients.

"Our data suggest that microbial contamination of keyboards is prevalent and that keyboards may be successfully decontaminated with disinfectants," the researchers said in their report.

Water and Disinfectants Help Clean Computer Keyboards

Cleaning your keyboard with a disinfectant wipe or even plain water may remove over 95 percent of the bacteria lingering there.

The researchers also put bacteria onto laptop computers, then attempted to remove the bacteria with various substances after 45 minutes. The researchers used a paper towel dampened with sterile water, alcohol or chlorine, or disinfecting wipes made by Clorox and Metrex.

It was found that all of the disinfectants, as well as the sterile water, removed or inactivated over 95 percent of the bacteria. The researchers said that the commercial wipes were effective for 48 hours, while the alcohol- and water-moistened paper towels were not effective in the long-term.

It should be noted that lead researcher William Rutala, PhD, MPH, has consulted for both [Clorox and Metrex](#), while another of the study's researchers has consulted for Clorox.

Keyboards are Not the Only Germy Office Accessories

A series of studies called "[Germs in the Workplace](#)," found that the following four office surfaces had the most bacteria (in this order):

- **Phones**
- **Desks**
- **Computer keyboard**
- **Computer mouse**

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"Desks are really bacteria cafeterias," said Dr. Charles Gerba, who led the study. "They're breakfast buffets, lunch tables and snack bars, as we spend more and more hours at the office. Germ levels on desks could be considered a business liability."

How to Keep Your Computer Keyboard and Office Germ-Free and Healthy

Researchers of the UNC study suggested cleaning hospital keyboards daily, or when visibly soiled. They also recommended cleaning the keyboard with a disinfectant wipe before a new person uses it.

Sources

[Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology. 2006 Apr;27\(4\):372-7](#)
[WebMD April 26, 2006](#)

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