

Keyboards host more bacteria than toilet seats

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New research suggests that desktop bacteria cafeteria could be helping spread colds and stomach ailments around the office.

Presenter: Ashley Hall

Speakers: John Boag is from the London-based consumer group; Chuck Gerba is a Professor of Environmental Biology
(Sound of typing)

ASHLEY HALL: Your parents probably taught you to wash your hands after visiting the toilet but now they might need to tell you after using a computer.

JOHN BOAG: We are sort of looking at the coli form type of bugs so the ones that people are familiar with, e. coli and staphylococcus. Those sorts of things so it can give you similar thing to food poisoning. So, you know, diarrhoea, vomiting, that sort of thing.

ASHLEY HALL: John Boag is from the London-based consumer group, Tests at his office reveal that four out of 33 computer keyboards were potential health hazards and one of the keyboards was home to five times more germs than the office's toilet seat.

The bug bazaar is partly blamed on poor hand-washing but John Boag has told the BBC, people who eat at their desk are also responsible.

JOHN BOAG: It's really getting bits of foods and crumbs and those sorts of things inside the keyboard, which is then going to fester and really proliferate any sort of bacteria there they are just going to breed, so best to move your keyboard away if you have to eat at your desk.

ASHLEY HALL: A more comprehensive study at the University of Arizona last year had similar results.

(Sound of typing)

CHUCK GERBA: We observed that people really don't clean their desks or keyboards until they start sticking to them, it seems like.

ASHLEY HALL: Chuck Gerba is a Professor of Environmental Biology.

CHUCK GERBA: People haven't really thought much about office hygiene, but it's also considered personal space so like janitor crews won't touch them and if the individual doesn't clean them up, nobody does apparently.

I think it is important particularly if you share computers or office space. That is when you get to worry about it more because you are also sharing germs at the same time. And also I think it is a good practice if you eat at your desk a lot because we found people eat at their desk, basically turn their desktop into a bacteria cafeteria because crumbs accumulate and other things so particularly if you eat a lot at your desk, you might take some time to actually clean it up.

ASHLEY HALL: And, contrary to popular belief that women are more cleanliness-focused on men, Dr Gerba found that women's desks carry three to four times the number of bacteria than men's.

CHUCK GERBA: Women tend to store food more often than men at their desks. About 70 per cent of all women store food in their desks where only less than 50 per cent of men do that, so bacteria and germs have more to eat in a woman's desk than a man's desk apparently.

ASHLEY HALL: The good news is, it's a simple problem to solve.

CHUCK GERBA: Practice good hand hygiene. You know wash your hands on a regular basis and maybe use a hand sanitiser. And of course, use something like a disinfectant wipe. Wipe down particularly your desk top, phone and keyboards because they are the germiest areas.

ASHLEY HALL: Although changing office behaviour might be a bigger job than it seems. The consumer group's research also found that one in 10 people never clean their keyboard while 20 per cent never clean their mouse.

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