



Women's desks are 'germier'

Study: Their workspaces have up to four times more bacteria than men's

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TUCSON, Ariz. - Your office desk harbors far more bacteria than your workplace restroom, and if you're a woman, chances are your workspace has more germs than your male co-workers', a new research report shows.

Women have three to four times the number of bacteria in, on and around their desks, phones, computers, keyboards, drawers and personal items as men do, the study by University of Arizona professor Charles Gerba showed. Gerba, a professor of soil, water and environmental sciences, tested more than 100 offices on the UA campus and in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oregon and Washington, D.C. The \$40,000 study was commissioned by the Clorox Co.

"I thought for sure men would be germier," Gerba said. "But women have more interactions with small children and keep food in their desks. The other problem is makeup."

Tidy doesn't mean clean

Don't get Gerba wrong: Women's desks typically looked cleaner. But the knickknacks are more abundant, and cosmetics and hand lotions make prime germ-transfer agents, Gerba said. Makeup cases also make for fine germ homes, along with phones, purses and desk drawers.

Food in desk drawers also harbors lots of microorganisms, and it is more abundant among female office workers. Gerba found 75 percent of women had munchies in their desks.

"I was really surprised how much food there was in a woman's desk," he said. "If there's ever a famine, that's the first place I'll look for food."

Back pocket an 'incubator for bacteria'

The news isn't all negative for the fairer sex.

Gerba found the worst overall office germ offender is men's wallets.

"It's in your back pocket where it's nice and warm, it's a great incubator for bacteria," Gerba said.

Another hot spot for bacteria in men's offices: the personal digital assistant.

"Men tend to play with their Palm Pilots more," Gerba said. "I think they're playing video games or something."

The average office desktop has 400 times more bacteria than the average office toilet seat, Gerba said.

Gerba said using a hand sanitizer and using a disinfectant on office surfaces helps, with 25 percent fewer bacteria found on surfaces that were regularly disinfected. Once-a-day use should be sufficient.

"You don't have to go crazy with it, but with the key areas, desktops, phones and keyboards probably need to be disinfected once in a while," he said.

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