

Infection Prevention and You



Workplace infection prevention

Most Americans work outside the home. Whether in an office or in a more non-traditional setting, we come into contact with many different individuals and things that can spread infection. So what can we do on a routine basis to protect our health and the overall health of our working environment?

We can start by focusing on how germs are spread (or transmitted). Typically germs that can cause infection are transmitted by contact spread, airborne spread or droplet spread. Contact spread illnesses can be transmitted by touching an ill individual or by contact with their contaminated environment (such as their phone, keyboard or other personal items). Airborne illnesses are transmitted by breathing in germs from the air that has been contaminated by an individual with this type of illness. Droplet transmission occurs when we are exposed to respiratory secretions (e.g., mucus) coughed up by individuals infected with droplet-transmitted germs. Most illnesses that we might be exposed to at work are either contact or droplet transmitted, and there are routine prevention methods available for our protection.

Personal hygiene practices

- **Hand Hygiene** - the spread of many illnesses can be prevented with regular hand hygiene. You should thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after visiting the toilet, before and after preparing and eating food, and after touching clients or equipment. Dry your hands with disposable paper towels. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used unless hands are visibly dirty.
- **Skin Integrity** - intact and healthy skin is a major barrier to pathogens. Any cuts or abrasions should be cleaned and covered with a waterproof bandage.
- **Personal items** - don't share combs, brushes, towels, clothing, razors, toothbrushes, shavers, or other personal items.

Cleanliness in the workplace

- Minimize clutter to enable appropriate cleaning of the environment.
- Regularly clean and disinfect your keyboard, desk, tables, bathrooms.
- When using disinfectants always wear gloves, clean the surfaces before using the disinfectant, and always follow the manufacturers' instructions exactly.
- Stay home if you're sick so you don't spread your germs to others.

Respiratory etiquette

- Cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of your arm, not your hands. If you sneeze into your hands or blow your nose, wash your hands immediately after.
- Dispose of contaminated tissues in waste containers.
- Clean hands after coughs and sneezes.

Updated: 4/23/2014