

6 tips to prevent your WFH office from becoming a petri dish

The shift to remote work may give the impression we are more in control of our environment and particularly our health - but it's entirely likely our work-from-home habits are less than sanitary.



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“The home office has a lot more bacteria than work offices do,” said Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, one of South Africa’s largest workplace design consultancies.

“In the office, companies hire cleaners to clean floors and desks and all other work surfaces, often at the end of every day.

“But at home, many of us have developed habits that are, at best, not the healthiest, and at worst simply gross. We make phone calls from the bathroom. We let clutter pile up on our desks. We work from bed while balancing our coffee mug and muffin.”

While some of these habits are fairly benign, but not all.

Dust mites and other allergens can accumulate in a messy home, triggering coughs and a runny nose. Contaminated surfaces can transmit pathogens. Working from bed can cause sleep disruptions as well as aches and pains and other woes.

Certain habits also can act like super-spreaders of microbes.

Cellphones are one of the worst offenders. And when you consider where your phone goes in a typical day, that's no surprise. A survey by American telecommunications giant Verizon Communications Inc found that 90% of users admit to carrying their smartphones into the bathroom.

"Even in a meticulously clean bathroom, if you're picking up and putting down your phone before washing your hands, nasty bugs can attach to the screen and cover," Trim noted.

So can you prevent your space at home from becoming the proverbial petri dish? Here's Giant Leap's top tips:

- **Keep pets away from your computer**

Given how much time you're spending at home, it's only natural that your pets will want to take up residence on or near where you are working. But allowing your cat to crawl over your keyboard, for example, can lead to build-up of fur, or even traces of kitty litter.

- **Ensure adequate ventilation**

Opening a window to let in fresh air is ideal. Also consider getting an air purifier than can screen out most microbes. Trim added. "Better ventilation leads to a 60% improvement in cognitive performance."

Removing shoes when entering a home makes sense for those working from home, too - especially since we track in a lot of pesticides and chemicals from the street.

- **Use the right cleaning products**

Cleaning surfaces with soap and water first, then use a disinfectant. Alcohol-based wipes might be better for electronics. Use paper towels when cleaning. The worst object in the home is a sponge or dish cloth; things grow in it.

- **Avoid eating at your desk**

Having food on your desk can breed bacteria. And there is another, less obvious risk posed by deskside meals. "You're sitting in the same position as when you're working and that increases the chance you'll develop repetitive strain injuries," Trim warned.

- **Deep clean**

Thoroughly clean your computer, desk and other equipment once or twice a week. Give extra attention to your mouse, keyboard and other objects that are touched frequently. You also can upgrade to a washable keyboard with added antimicrobial protection.

- **Don't let papers or other detritus pile up**

It's really important to put things away at the end of the day. "Not only can the clutter harbour bacteria, but it can increase our stress levels without our even realising it," Trim concluded.