

## Germophobes Rule

One benefit (maybe the only one) of the current Swine Flu hysteria is the validation of my longstanding phobia regarding germs. Not *all* germs - I'm perfectly happy with my own. It's yours that I'm worried about.

Not that I'm obsessed. I had the misfortune recently of reading an article saying that over 80% of germs are transmitted by hands, and last time I checked most of us had a matched set that aren't real picky about what they come in contact with.

When you consider all the door handles, phones, elevator buttons and pens you come in contact with (not to mention shaking hands with mobile germ incubators disguised as friends and business associates) 80% sounds about right.

I keep a liquid hand sanitizer on my desk which I apply generously when I can't avoid shaking peoples' hands, although I usually wait until they release their grip. I do this because I'm prudent and conscientious about maintaining community health. When *you* do the same thing, it's because you're a compulsive paranoid germophobe.

There is another name for the affliction that affects those of us who have a unreasonable fear of germs, contamination, or dirt – mysophobia. This condition makes the sufferer avoid germ contact to the point of becoming a recluse, which will actually be a big advantage if this Swine Flu pandemic ever really gets going.

It has been a long time since my 9<sup>th</sup> grade biology class, and all I remember about germs is that they are pathetic little critters with no real purpose in life other than to reproduce as quickly as possible. That's pretty much their one-line job description.

I don't recall if there are male and female germs, although reproduction would be pretty boring for them otherwise. It's easy for me to imagine them congregating in tiny germ-ridden nightclubs, the males possibly

wearing tiny smoking jackets like Hugh Hefner and having all the time in the world to figure out ways to score with the females.

The females – having only a single cell to think with – are so stupid that they fall for every lame opening line tossed out by the equally stupid males. A one-night stand followed by a brief incubation period, and...bam! Billions of unwed mother germs.

My irrational fears are fueled by the unhappy fact that germs are invisible and can grow on pretty much anything. I read an article last week that says that your desktop at work is a primary breeding ground. Unlike your average restroom, your average desk is rarely cleaned and simply collects and propagates germs that you unwittingly pick up on your random trips around your workplace.

A 2002 study revealed that the typical desktop is infested with almost 21,000 germs per square inch. That works out to more than 10 million germs on your average-sized desk, and that's a lot of single-celled trysts in progress at any given moment. Try not to think about it.

Since your average toilet seat weighs in at a mere 49 germs psi, it may be time to consider moving your office into the bathroom (although the toilet lid isn't the most ergonomic of seating options).

For the morbidly curious, a survey that you can take at [www.oneplusyou.com](http://www.oneplusyou.com) estimates the number of germs living on your computer keyboard based on 15 questions about your personal hygiene, habits and work environment. Primarily because I never clean it, my keyboard allegedly has just under 3 million germs on it.

It's tragically ironic that my mysophobia ranks second only to my dislike of cleaning my house or office, so I'm helpless to improve my lot in life. Fortunately, it turns out that it's possible to type an occasional column while wearing rubber gloves and a face mask.

*Dave Parsons can usually be found in his contaminated office at his business on the Coralville Strip, trying not to touch anything.*