



Hygiene issues in an open plan office environment

It is becoming increasingly evident that cleanliness and hygiene in the workplace is no longer just a matter of pleasantries, but is a vital factor for productivity. With more and more offices converting to open plan, people are socialising more frequently, sharing facilities and technology, and thereby facing more hygiene risks than before. As many, especially younger generations, are also becoming more health conscious, ensuring a clean and safe work environment for employees becomes more important for possible recruits and current talent.

Offices are shifting from one-size-fits-all to more flexible environments, this is leading to increased hygiene worries and needs all around the world. New data from the global [Essity Hygiene & Health report 2018-2019](#)¹ and insights from the [Tork Office Report](#) show that today's offices need to accommodate proactive hygiene solutions, enabling employees to take control over workplace hygiene. Here we look into the details and trends and dig deeper into how hygiene solutions can give a competitive edge in a market where offices are often open plan.



Up to **90%** of offices are estimated to be open plan

Open plan offices have both upsides and downsides

It's estimated that up to 90% of offices in Australasia, 70% in the US² and 73% in the UK³ today have open floor plans, and while open concept offices have several advantages in a collaborative environment, they do require a higher level of maintenance and a relevant hygiene strategy with solutions adapted for the flexible office environment.

A number of studies have found a correlation between the number of people working in a room and the rate of sickness absence^{4,5}. That is – the more people sharing a room, the more exposed they are to infectious diseases.

1. Essity Hygiene & Health Report 2018-2019. This report among 15.000 people from 12 countries is the latest edition in a series of reports that Essity, the maker of the Tork brand, has been publishing since 2008 with the aim to raise awareness about the pivotal role hygiene, sanitation, and health play for well-being
2. BBC (2017). Why open offices are bad for us.
3. Euractiv (2014) The French are the least satisfied with their working conditions.
4. Pejtersen, J. H., Feveile, H., Christensen, K. B., & Burr, H. (2011). Sickness absence associated with shared and open-plan offices—a national cross sectional questionnaire survey. *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 376-382.

Start with the basics: the washrooms

Staying healthy by keeping clean and hygienic in an office can be difficult as many offices do not maintain proper hygiene levels, even in the washrooms. About 22% of employees say they often refrain from using the toilets where they work, 30% among younger people⁶. The most common reason for this is that the toilets are unhygienic or messy. Neither is it uncommon that they lack toilet paper or soap which also impairs the facilities. Such factors impact both the workforce and their perception of the office, making hygiene a cause for concern.

Increased worries about hygiene

Today, about 40% globally say they often worry about becoming ill due to poor hygiene, and there are noticeable differences between age groups⁶. Employers seeking to attract and retain millennials should be aware of the fact that they worry a lot more about lack of hygiene than the older part of the workforce. For example, 50% of people aged 16-25 say they often worry about hygiene, while that figure is only 21% aged 61 and older.

Hygiene routines come together at the office

Hygiene worry is likely caused by both the physical environment around us and the behavior of our co-workers. Lacking routines when it comes to ensuring sufficient hygiene make people feel like their co-workers are not doing enough to avoid spreading germs in general. We know, for example, that 15% say they do not wash their hands after visiting the toilet, 31% do not wash their hands before eating food and 50% do not wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing⁶. Such behavior affects how people feel about going to work, spending time at the office and feeling secure in terms of the perceived risk of getting ill.

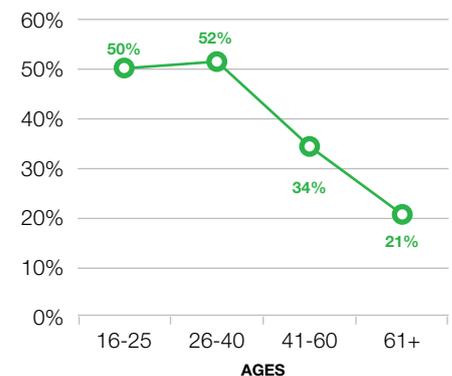
5. Bodin Danielsson, C., Chungkham, H. S., Wulff, C., & Westerlund, H. (2014). Office design's impact on sick leave rates. *Ergonomics*, 57(2), 139-147.

6. Essity (2018). The Essentials Initiative Survey 2018, found at www.essity.com/company/essentials-initiative/.

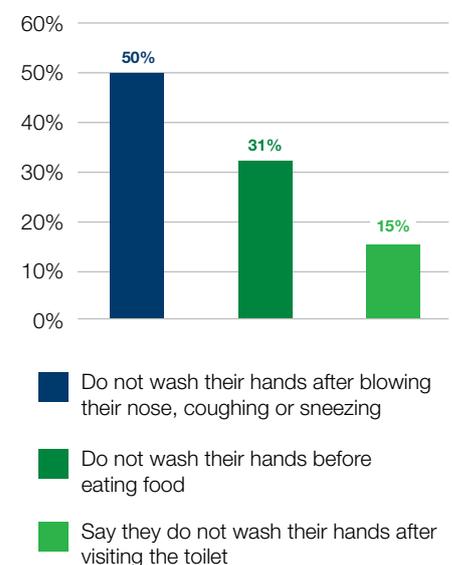
1 in 5

(22%) say they often refrain from using the toilets at work

Worry often or always about becoming ill due to poor hygiene



Poor hygiene routines



The solution is a hygiene strategy

By implementing a hygiene strategy in the office, employers can increase both productivity and well-being by reducing sick-days and hygiene worries. Studies show that executing the right hand hygiene program in an office can reduce the amount of sick leave by over 20%⁷ and has been shown to reduce worry, improve morale and the attitude toward the employee's workplace. Even minimal interventions can be great at improving hygiene and have been proven to reduce the number of health insurance claims⁷.

The Tork interactive office online provides practical insights on how to place dispensers as well as tips and tricks for which areas to prioritise and how to make it easier for co-workers and visitors to maintain proper hygiene levels.

Increasing availability

According to a recent study, one of the most important factors for improving hand hygiene and thus reducing the incidence of infectious diseases is simply to provide more opportunities for hand hygiene⁸, meaning making facilities available and making sure they are always stocked.

By strategically using:

- Tork Hygiene Stand
- Tork Foam or Gel Sanitiser

at locations in the office with high traffic, companies are able to offer employees hygiene products such as hand sanitiser and tissues with much higher availability and ease. Walking past the stand or dispenser is also a simple reminder for both employees and guests of the importance of hand hygiene and it demonstrates that the company cares about their wellbeing.

20%

**reduction in
sick-leave if
executing the
right hand
hygiene program**



To learn more about how your company can offer its employees best practice opportunities for maintaining proper hygiene levels, see the Tork interactive office at www.tork.com.au/recommendations/businesses/office or www.tork.co.nz/recommendations/businesses/office

7. Arbogast, J. W., Moore-Schiltz, L., Jarvis, W. R., Harpster-Hagen, A., Hughes, J., & Parker, A. (2016). Impact of a comprehensive workplace hand hygiene program on employer health care insurance claims and costs, absenteeism, and employee perceptions and practices. *Journal of occupational and environmental medicine*, 58(6), e231.

8. Zivich, P. N., Gancz, A. S., & Aiello, A. E. (2017). Effect of hand hygiene on infectious diseases in the office workplace: A systematic review. *American journal of infection control*.



Think ahead.