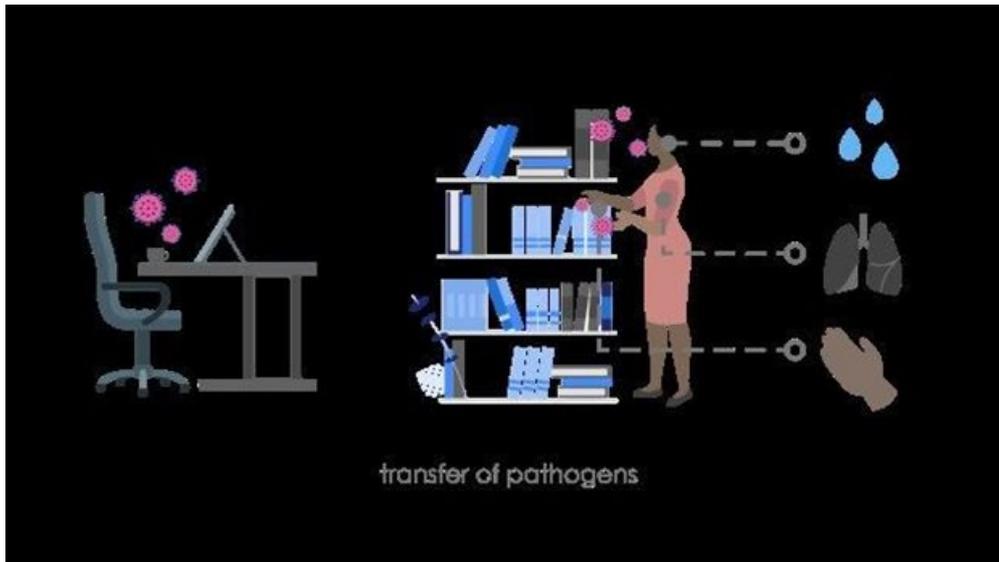


Paragon Group explores healthy-building design in masterclass

The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the health of our built environment, with increased attention and concern at preventing the spreading of pathogens. In order to highlight the important role that the built environment plays in occupant health, the Paragon Group is hosting an online masterclass entitled 'Designing towards a healthy built environment' at 10am on Tuesday, 4 August.



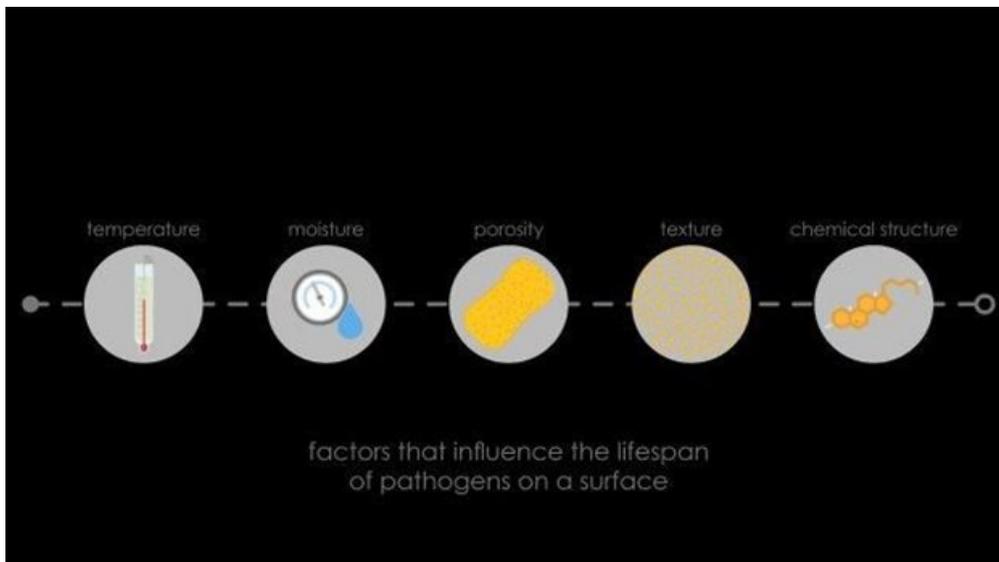
“Predictions are that we will definitely see more large-scale outbreaks of epidemics in future. This is, therefore, something well worth paying careful attention to,” cautions Paragon Group director Estelle Meiring.

A recent study indicated that people typically spend 90% of their time indoors. The built environment, therefore, has the potential to have a major impact on our health – both good and bad. Another study found that the risk of infection indoors is almost 19 times higher than outdoors.

Accredited masterclass

The masterclass has been accredited by the Gauteng Institute for Architecture, meaning that participants can earn 0.25 continuing professional development (CPD) points. The two-hour long masterclass will be presented by Meiring, and is open to participation by students, architects and the general public.

The masterclass will cover a wide range of aspects in the built environment that affect occupant health, including: indoor air quality, humidity, thermal health and ventilation, access to daylight, building surfaces, biophilic design and spatial organisation.



Mental and social well-being

Apart from the physical aspects of building-occupant health, Meiring points out it would be remiss to ignore the influence of the built environment on mental and social well-being. With the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting people's lives, medical infrastructure and economies globally, it is understandable that the current focus is on the physical aspects of health and, more particularly, on the transfer of pathogens. Hence limiting, or even completely avoiding, social contact has become the norm.

However, the general population worldwide is reporting heightened feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. Research suggests that even less-extreme forms of social distancing such as staying several metres away from other people or avoiding regular outings might take a toll on mental and social well-being.



Estelle Meiring, director, Paragon Group

Finding equilibrium

There is a tension between these two aspects of occupant health: Building environments that allow a high degree of connectivity, thus supporting mental and social well-being, have also been shown to house an abundance and diversity of microbes, potentially increasing occupant exposure to pathogens. Indeed, survey-based assessments have found a correlation between shared or open-floor plans in offices and employee sick leave.

“There is definitely an equilibrium that needs to be found between all aspects of human health,” stresses Meiring. “How do we design a built environment that encourages social interaction and collaboration in a pandemic world? How do we meet people's absolute basic needs for social well-being, while keeping them safe from potentially harmful pathogens?”

These and other critical issues relating to health and the built environment will be discussed at the Paragon Group masterclass. For more information, [click here](#).

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