



Tips to Help Workers Avoid the Flu

November 17, 2008 by Fred Hosier

Want to help keep workers healthy this flu season? The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends three steps to stay healthy.

1. Get a flu shot. This is the most important step. Getting vaccinated is especially important for people at high risk for serious flu complications, including young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart or lung disease, and people 65 or older. People who live with high-risk people should also get a flu shot to protect their high-risk contact.
2. Take everyday preventive steps. Those include covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Even coughing into your sleeve is better than into the air. Wash your hands often with warm soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. If you get the flu, stay home from work. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because germs spread that way.
3. Take flu antiviral drugs if your doctor recommends them. There are prescription pills that keep the flu virus from reproducing in your body. They can make your illness milder and prevent serious complications. These drugs work best when taken soon after symptoms begin. Flu symptoms include high fever, headache, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches.

You can get free materials, such as handouts and posters, for your workplace from the CDC to encourage workers to take these steps. Just go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace/>.

Cold and Flu Season

Got the sniffles? Low-grade temperature? Hacking cough?

Here are a few tips to consider:

- If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick to prevent others from catching your illness.
- Reschedule meetings or request someone to fill in for you.
- Check with your manager for options on working from home or flexing your time.

Fighting Germs in the Workplace

- Cover your mouth and nose with disposable paper products when sneezing or coughing.
- Be cautious when leaving food out for others (e.g., snacks in open food containers) – this aids the spread of germs.

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- Wash your hands - Proper hand washing is the best way to avoid spreading germs. Rub your hands together with soap and water for at least 15 seconds. Rinse your hands thoroughly and dry them completely. Wash hands before eating and after contact with shared equipment.
 - Disinfect - Wipe your phone, keyboard, computer mouse, and doorknobs with paper towels and disinfectant – anything frequently touched by you and your co-workers.

Antiviral Treatment

Two antiviral drugs (Zanamivir and Oseltamivir) are approved and commercially available for use for the 2008 – 2009 flu season. Keep in mind that these are prescription drugs, 70-90% effective in healthy adults, and if taken within 2 days of getting sick may reduce the symptoms and severity.

Note: They will not help symptoms associated with the common cold or other flu-like illnesses.