

SAFETY NEWS

DECEMBER 2014

news & notes

THE COST OF COLDS & FLU

- According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, employers collectively **lose about 15 million workdays each year to colds**, rivaling the 17.6 million lost workdays for serious injuries and illnesses reported to OSHA in a recent year.
- **The average worker endures about four colds each year.** More workdays are lost when employees leave work to care for a child with a cold or flu.
- The Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine reports that **employees who work with a cold lose about 6 hours of productivity for the duration of the cold.** If each worker has four colds per year, that comes to 24 hours, or 3 days, of lost productivity per worker annually.
- The collective annual loss for U.S. businesses to the common cold is **\$20 billion to \$25 billion.**
- A survey by Kimberly-Clark Professional (KCP) found that **59 percent of people go to work when they're sick.** Three out of ten said it was because they were too important to the business operation to stay home.

Train Employees on How to Be Sick

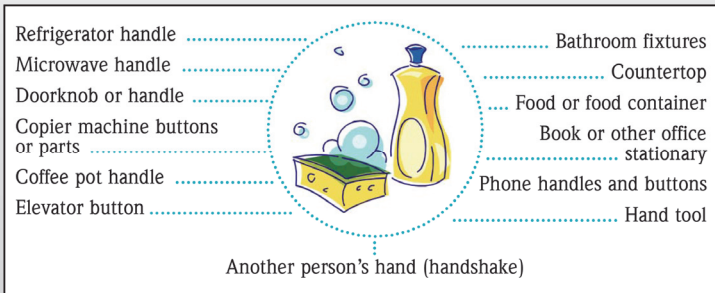
Keep them protected & productive

The headline may look like a misprint, but presenteeism is a major problem in many workplaces. "Presenteeism" is when sick employees come to work anyway and often infect their co-workers as well. So, it's a good idea to train your employees on how to be sick so they can get well and get back to normal more quickly.

First, help employees tell the difference between a cold and the flu. The common cold is a virus that typically infects the nose and throat and can occur any time during the year. Influenza, or "the flu", is an infection of the respiratory system caused by an influenza virus and is most common during the winter into spring.

Next, ensure employees know how the cold and the flu spread. Colds are spread more readily when people are indoors, where the chances increase for contact with contaminated surfaces and inhalation of airborne viral particles. The flu is most commonly spread when viral particles are emitted into the air by coughing and sneezing, or when a contaminated surface is touched.

COMMON SOURCES OF VIRAL INFECTION



The primary pathways to infection are:

- **The eyes and nose.** Cold viruses are very hardy; they can survive up to 3 hours on surfaces. When people touch an infected surface with their hands, then touch their nose or rub their eyes, the virus can enter the tear ducts or sinuses and infect the nasal passage. Flu viruses can also spread via this pathway.
- **Inhalation.** Breathing in viral particles is the most common pathway for flu infection. It is also a pathway for cold viruses when infected airborne mucus droplets are inhaled into the nose or throat.

Ideal conditions for the spread of infections are:

- When people **congregate indoors**,
- When **humidity or indoor air is low**, especially during cold weather, *and*
- When the **dry air makes the lining of the nose drier** and probably more vulnerable to viral infection.

Training your employees to stay home when they're not feeling well and during the infectious stages of illnesses will help you minimize decreased productivity by ensuring that when employees are on the job, they're working at full capacity. It also ensures that sick employees won't infect co-workers, leading to more sick days from more workers.

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GOOD HAND HYGIENE & COUGH ETIQUETTE

As we move into cold and flu season, prevent the spread of disease by washing your hands frequently or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Proper hand-washing technique involves:

- Wetting your hands with clean running water and applying soap;
- Lathering hands and scrubbing well for at least 20 seconds;
- Rinsing hands under clean running water; *and*
- Drying hands thoroughly.

Proper technique for the use of hand sanitizer includes:

- Applying hand sanitizer to palm of one hand;
- Rubbing both hands together; *and*
- Rubbing all surfaces of hands and fingers together until product dries.

Coughing and sneezing can spread diseases—even before people realize they are sick. Practice good cough etiquette by:

- Coughing and sneezing into a tissue;
- Putting used tissues in the waste basket;
- Coughing and sneezing into the upper sleeve or elbow, if tissues aren't handy; *and*
- Washing or sanitizing hands after coughing or sneezing.

Use the following acronym to help you remember the components of good hand hygiene:

Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.

Avoid direct or close contact with a person who has a cold or flu.

Sanitize your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand washing is not feasible.

Hold your elbow to your mouth when you sneeze or cough to stop the spread of germs from hand-contact.

Cold or Flu?

Know the difference

Although people often use the terms “cold” and “flu” interchangeably, they’re actually quite different.

The common cold is a virus that typically infects the nose and throat. Colds are not caused by bacteria. But bacterial infections—usually sinusitis or ear infection—can occur as complications of a cold. There are 200 viruses known to cause the symptoms of a cold. Some infect the nose, while others infect the upper respiratory system. Nose viruses are most active during early fall, spring and summer, while upper respiratory viruses are most active in winter and early spring.

Influenza, or the flu, is an infection of the respiratory system caused by the influenza virus. The flu is most common during the winter into spring. Symptoms begin abruptly (often with a fever), are usually more severe than cold symptoms, and typically last a week or more. Complications from the flu can lead to pneumonia. Visit the CDC website for information on this year’s flu season: www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season

Use this information from the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Onset after infection	2 or 3 days	1 day, then quickly
Fever	Rare	Common; starts quickly and lasts 3 or 4 days
Headache	Rare	Common
General aches	Slight	Common; often severe
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Common; can last up to 3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Common; an early symptom
Stuffy nose, sneezing	Common	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest pain, cough	Mild	Mild to moderate

Cold or flu quiz

Test what you know

Select the correct answer for the following statements.

1. The common cold is caused by a bacteria. True or False
2. Fever is a common symptom of a cold. True or False
3. The flu is caused by a virus. True or False
4. How many days after infection do cold symptoms show up?

a. 1	b. 3	c. 5
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5. How many days after infection do flu symptoms show up?

a. 1	b. 3	c. 5
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ANSWERS

1. False. The common cold is a virus that typically infects the nose and throat. 2. False. Fever is rarely a symptom of a cold but is a common symptom of the flu. 3. True. The flu is an infection of the respiratory system caused by the influenza virus. 4. b. 5. a.