



Colds and Flu at Work

Stay Home if you are Sick

Most of the country is seeing a widespread outbreak of the flu and the American Red Cross urges people who have not yet gotten a flu vaccine to try to get their vaccination.

Each year, between 5% and 20% of Americans get the flu and miss a staggering 70 million work days as a result. Each cold experienced by an employee causes an average of 8.7 lost work hours.

“Flu season doesn’t peak until late January or February and can last until May, so it is not too late to get a flu vaccine,” said Dr. Richard Benjamin, Chief Medical Director for the Red Cross. “It takes about two weeks for the flu vaccine to provide full protection, so the sooner someone gets vaccinated, the sooner they will be fully protected.”

Call in sick when you need to. Viruses are easy to spread in close quarters like offices. Stay home if you have any of these symptoms:

Fever, headache, extreme tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Work Place Safety Steps

The best step someone can take to prevent the spread of flu in their workplace is to get vaccinated. If someone is sick with fever and respiratory symptoms, they should stay at home until 24 hours after their fever is gone without taking medicine. Other steps workers can take include:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water isn’t available.
- Avoid touching the nose, mouth and eyes.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough. Viruses are mostly spread through mucus. Cover your mouth with the inside of your elbow so you don’t cough or sneeze into your hand.
- Wipe down your desk and other common areas. Telephones, desks, water fountain handles, microwave door handles, and computer keyboards in offices contain large amounts of germs.
- Don’t use a co-worker’s phone, desk, computer or other tools.
- Avoid shaking hands or coming in close contact with co-workers who may be ill.