

# Influenza

## Preventing Influenza in the Workplace

### Symptoms

Influenza can cause a wide range of symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Each year, severe illnesses and death have occurred as a result of illness associated with influenza viruses.

### How Influenza is Spread

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or possibly their nose.

### What Can Employers do to Protect Employees?



- Encourage sick workers to stay home and away from the workplace. Provide flexible leave policies.
  - Encourage infection control practices in the workplace by displaying posters that address and remind workers about proper hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.
  - Provide written guidance (posters, emails, memos, etc...) in the appropriate language and literacy levels of everyone in the workplace. Work closely with local public health officials to ensure the provision of the most appropriate and up-to-date information.
- Provide sufficient facilities for proper hand washing. Consider alcohol-based (at least 60%) sanitizers or wipes in common workplace areas such as lobbies, corridors, and waiting rooms.
  - Provide tissues, disinfectants, and disposable towels for employees to clean their work surfaces, especially during cold and flu seasons.
  - To reduce the chance of viruses, disinfect commonly-touched hard surfaces in the workplace, such as work stations, counter tops, door knobs, and bathroom surfaces by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to directions on the product label.

### What Can Employees do to Reduce the Spread of Flu in the Workplace?

- Employees should stay home if sick. Employees with symptoms of influenza-like illness should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities (fever should be gone without the use of fever-reducing medicine).
- Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home should monitor their health every day, notify their supervisor and stay home if they become ill. Employees who have an underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should call their health care provider for advice.

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used *if* soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread easily this way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people. Avoid unnecessary sharing of common office supplies or equipment with sick employees; if possible, wipe equipment down with a disinfectant.

## **How Businesses Can Respond to the Impact a Severe Influenza Outbreak May Have on Their Operations and Employees**

- Identify a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for dealing with issues and impact at the workplace, including contacting health department for communication tools and guidance.
- Share your plans with employees and clearly communicate expectations as it pertains to good hygienic practices such as: covering coughs, hand washing, etc...
- Implement business continuity plans if there is significant absenteeism in the workplace during an outbreak.
- Review your plan with regard to increases or decreases in demand for your products and/or services during the outbreak, such as the need for more hygiene supplies.
- Review the CDC travel-related websites [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for up-to-date information and communicate these recommendations to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers inside and outside the worksite.
- Plan for the possibility of unscheduled leave that encourages employees who are sick to stay at home to care for themselves and others who are ill with the flu or children dismissed from school.
- Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts), if needed.



***For more sources of information on this topic visit:***

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMINISTRATION [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)