



Center for Hygiene & Health in Home and Community

Tips to Prevent Colds and Flu in the Workplace

It's that time of year again, the time when you start hearing coughing and sneezing throughout the office and a box of tissues is placed conveniently near your computer keyboard.

This month, we focus on ways to prevent the spread of cold and flu in the workplace.

The cold and flu season typically runs from November – April. Readily spread when people are indoors, cold and flu viruses are often passed along from person to person and surface to surface in the workplace. According to the CDC, people are most contagious during the first 2-3 days of contracting a cold and almost immediately and for about 5 days thereafter after being infected with the flu – even before symptoms develop. However, there are many actions you can take to prevent the spread of cold and flu viruses at work.



Cold and Flu Prevention in the Workplace

- ❖ Wash Your Hands for at least 15-20 seconds with soap many times a day or sanitize with an alcohol-gel hand sanitizer, especially following contact with potentially contaminated surfaces:
 - Hands or face of others – including handshakes
 - Doorknob or handle (including microwave and refrigerator)
 - Copier machine buttons or parts
 - Another person's keyboard or phone
 - Coffee pot handle
 - Elevator button
 - Countertop
 - Food or food container handled by others
 - Shared books or other office materials
 - Shared hand or power tools
- ❖ Following washing, turn off the faucet with a paper towel
- ❖ Dry your hands with an air dryer or a clean paper towel
- ❖ Use a paper towel to open the bathroom door and dispose of paper towel in a trash bin outside of door
- ❖ Use a hand sanitizer between washing
- ❖ Avoid touching your face, eyes, or rubbing your nose

- ❖ Wash out your water bottle daily
- ❖ Clean shared items such as phones, keyboards, handles and door knobs with alcohol wipes or other sanitizer-type wipes
- ❖ Avoid close contact with anyone who has a cold or flu
- ❖ Sneeze and cough into a tissue, throw the tissue away, and then wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than your hand



- ❖ Drink plenty of fluids, but do not share drinking cups or straws
- ❖ Get lots of fresh air
- ❖ Exercise regularly and frequently
- ❖ Eat healthy foods such as whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables
- ❖ Don't smoke and decrease alcohol consumption
- ❖ Relax – stress can decrease immunity
- ❖ Avoid contact with known allergens - allergies affecting the nose or throat may increase the chances of getting a cold or flu



Prevention Myths

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases there are some common myths about preventing and treating colds and flu.

Myth 1: Take antibiotics

Fact: Antibiotics only act on bacterial infections, and they do not work against viruses, including cold and flu viruses

Myth 2: Starve a cold and feed a fever/flu

Fact: There is no conclusive evidence for withholding or increasing food or drink intake to reduce the symptoms or duration of a cold. The body needs adequate nutrition and fluids, especially during stress, to maintain body functions.

Myth 3: Vaccines prevent colds

Fact: Vaccines only work against the specific type of influenza virus for which it was designed and there are no effective universal vaccines against the common cold viruses.

Myth 4: Take Vitamin C to prevent or stop colds

Fact: Vitamin C trials have shown encouraging results for reducing some cold symptoms and reducing the duration of illness; however, it hasn't been proven to cure or prevent infection.

Myth 5: Dress warmly or you'll catch a cold.

Fact: While it's important to keep warm, colds are spread person-to-person or from contact with a contaminated surface.



Wash your hands! The single best thing you can do to prevent cold and flu.

Treating a Cold or Flu

- ❖ If you do get sick, stay at home if you can
- ❖ Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water or juices – between 9-13 cups per day)
- ❖ De-stress and avoid strenuous activity – physical, emotional, or

mental stress can be major drains on the immune system

- ❖ Get plenty of rest – most people need seven to nine hours of sleep each night
- ❖ Drink green tea or ginger tea each stimulate the immune system to fight off infections
- ❖ Ask your doctor about over the counter drugs which may alleviate symptoms

Have these Items Handy While at Work

- ❖ Water, decaffeinated tea, or juice
- ❖ Tissues
- ❖ Eye drops
- ❖ Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- ❖ Hand cream or lotion
- ❖ Over the counter drugs
- ❖ Cough drops/lozenges
- ❖ Vitamins



For more information on how to stay healthy this winter, visit The Center for Hygiene & Health at www.simmons.edu/hygieneandhealth or the Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>.