

Flu remains one of the most common workplace illnesses

Every fall and winter, the common flu strain hits households and businesses, impacting five to 20 percent of Americans. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that the flu causes the average employee to miss an average of three days of work a year. When employees come to work with the flu or get the virus from work, everyone suffers.

Workplace illnesses are very common this time of year. Workers who come to work with the flu end up losing 10 to 30 percent of workdays, according to the report "Combating Normal Flu Virus," by the CEO of the Disability Management Employer Coalition.

Once the flu hits the workplace, it can be difficult to stop. The flu spreads very easily in workplace environments due to the lack of airflow and common areas. The flu virus is most commonly spread from droplets in the air that can travel up to three feet from infected individual just by coughing or sneezing. Workers can become infected with the flu virus by breathing in or touching the infected droplets left by a sick co-worker.

The flu and other viruses are often spread in workplaces by a sick worker coughing or sneezing into their hand, touching a commonly used device in the workplace such as a doorknob or phone, which then causes other workers to get infected after they touch the same objects.

Businesses need to make efforts to reduce the spread of disease in the workplace. Several ways businesses can help stop the spread of the flu this season include:

- Tell employees to stay home when sick
- Allow employees to work from home if they are contagious

- Provide disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizers for workers
- Make sure the office is properly cleaned and disinfected, especially in high traffic or widely used areas

Workplace illnesses should be taken seriously. Workers who have been subjected to illnesses at work have a right to try and stay healthy, and employers are required to provide a safe working environment for their employees. This includes protecting employees from occupational illnesses that can lead to a decline in workers' overall health. Workers can file workers' compensation claims for workplace illnesses and receive medical compensation for their illnesses.

Source: EHS Today, "[Flu in the Workplace: Why Should You Care?](#)" Sandy Smith, Oct. 12, 2012