

Encourage Workers to Properly Wash Their Hands to Avoid Spreading the Flu



Flu season is nearly upon us. And just one sick worker can infect half the workplace. So you need to take steps now to protect workers from getting the flu and/or passing it on to co-workers.

One of the easiest flu-prevention measures is to properly and regularly wash your hands. According to Health Canada, even if your hands appear to be clean, they may carry germs. Washing your hands not only prevents you from getting sick, but also reduces the risk of infecting others. Co-workers can get sick from direct contact with unwashed hands as well as from contact with shared objects such as doorknobs, keyboards, telephones, light switches and other equipment in the workplace.

So you should encourage workers to properly wash their hands on the job. Remind them to wash their hands often, especially:

- After coughing, sneezing or using tissues
- Before and after eating
- Before preparing food
- After handling raw meat
- After petting an animal
- After using the bathroom.

When using soap, workers should follow these steps to thoroughly rid their hands of germs:

- Remove any hand or arm jewellery and wet your hands with warm water. Add regular soap and rub your hands together for at least 15 seconds or about the length of time it takes to sing 'Happy Birthday.'
- Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
- Rinse your hands well under warm running water, using a rubbing motion.
- Wipe and dry your hands gently with a paper towel or a clean towel.
- Turn off the tap using the towel so that you don't re-contaminate your hands. Use the same towel to open the door when you leave.

An alcohol-based hand rub can be used if soap and water aren't available. First, use towelettes to remove obvious dirt, then use an alcohol-based hand rub according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Make sure your hands are dry, as wet hands will dilute the product. And use enough product to cover all the surfaces of your hands and fingers. Rub your hands together until the product has evaporated.

If your hands get dry from frequent washing or use of hand rubs, use a moisturizing lotion.

The OHS Insider has other resources to help prevent the spread of the flu in your workplace, including:

- A video on the importance of hand washing in a healthcare setting
- Information on proper coughing etiquette
- How to hold a flu clinic in your workplace where workers can get vaccinated
- A flu and pandemic influenza infographic you can display in the workplace.

And at SafetyPoster.com, you can buy posters on preventing colds and the flu, including ones on proper hand washing.