



## SAFETY TALKS:

### Flu in the Workplace

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), each year, the flu will infect 5 to 20 percent of people in the United States. Sharing it with customers and colleagues are common ways people are infected. So how do you keep it out of your workplace?

Experts believe the flu virus is spread mainly via airborne droplets when someone with the virus sneezes, coughs or speaks. A healthy person may also be infected with the flu virus by touching a surface contaminated by these droplets, then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. It's possible for someone to spread the flu virus before they even know they are sick. People infected with the flu virus are most contagious in the first three to four days after their illness begins, and some otherwise healthy adults may be able to infect others a day before their symptoms even begin.

Prevention is the key. Getting the flu vaccine is the "first and most important step in protecting against the flu virus," according to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID). A flu vaccination can help keep you from getting sick with the flu, and can reduce the risk of flu-associated hospitalizations. Flu vaccinations have been associated with reduced hospitalizations amount people with diabetes (79%) and chronic lung disease (52%), according to the CDC. Flu vaccinations also may make your illness less severe if you do get sick. (For example, a 2017 study showed that flu vaccinations reduced deaths, intensive care (ICU) admissions, ICU length of stay, and overall duration of hospitalization among hospitalized flu patients.)

Additional steps include frequent and thorough hand-washing; covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and then throwing the tissue away; refraining from touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and staying home for at least 24 hours after a fever has broken.

If you suspect you have the flu, see your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Your physician may prescribe antiviral medicines to attack the flu and help you feel better. These medicines must be taken within the first two days of getting sick to be most effective, according to the NFID.

Your workplace pandemic flu plan should be based on a "worst-case" scenario – one in which the virus causes severe illness in larger numbers of people. Planning for the worst-case ensures that employers will have the right type of equipment and enough of it on hand to protect you. It also ensures that employers have planned for additional control options so that they can pick the right combination for the specific pandemic flu virus. You may have additional planning considerations too. For example, you may need to think about what you'll do if schools and daycare facilities are closed.

**For more information, see Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic, OSHA Publication No. 3327, which can be accessed at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov) . For more on the flu, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)**