



5-minute safety talk

Keep Your Cold and Flu Germs to Yourself

It is estimated that one billion colds are caught annually in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 5 to 20 percent of the U.S. population catches the flu annually as well. The flu season in the U.S. typically ranges from November to April. While it is a myth that cold temperatures cause colds, it is true that cold weather keeps people indoors, making exposure more likely.

Here are some tips to help you avoid colds and the flu:

- Clean and wipe down shared surfaces such as countertops, keyboards and phones.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes, and wash hands thoroughly and often.
- Get a flu shot if possible (it is most important for children and the elderly).
- Eat healthy foods to strengthen your immune system.
- Exercise moderately to maintain a healthy immune system.
- Ask your doctor about vitamin supplements to help support your immune system.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Try to avoid people who are sick, and know when to stay home if you become sick.

Flu Symptoms

- High fever 102-104 degrees Fahrenheit
- Headache
- Extreme fatigue
- Dry cough and sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

Cold Symptoms

- Sore throat
- Cough, chest discomfort
- Mild fatigue
- Fever and headache are rare
- Runny nose

Complication of the Flu

Usually children and the elderly, or people with certain health conditions, are at risk for serious flu complications. Complications may include bacterial pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. Children may develop sinus problems and ear infections.

Stop the Spread of Germs

Germs are spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people can become infected by touching something contaminated by germs. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick. To prevent the spread of germs, cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough. Use tissues when you sneeze or if you have the sniffles. If tissues aren't available, sneeze into your sleeve – it is another great weapon against germs. But don't just throw tissues on the floor to pick up later; toss them in the trash and wash your hands frequently. Any kind of soap is effective in removing germs if you vigorously rub your hands together under running water for at least 15-30 seconds.

To work or not to work

Cold and flu are the most common contagious diseases in the workplace. But should you go to work sick or stay home? There are few hard and fast rules to help you decide. Health experts and HR professionals say personal judgment and common sense should be your guide.

You should stay home if you have a fever because you are probably the most contagious at that time, or if you cannot control your sneezing and coughing.

When in doubt, call your physician. And don't overtax your immune system by going to work if you're really suffering. Common colds can become more serious bacterial infections such as sinusitis, and influenza can turn into pneumonia.

If you decide to work and treat your symptoms with over-the-counter medications, check the label and ingredients, and talk to your pharmacist. Some cold and flu medicines (with antihistamines) can make you drowsy, and that can be dangerous when you drive a vehicle or work around any kind of machinery. Other over-the-counter medications can negatively react with maintenance medications you take regularly.

It's your decision

Most companies have formal sick day or attendance policies. HR professionals say that supervisors have the right and responsibility to tactfully and privately tell an obviously sick employee to go home, if necessary. The ultimate decision rests with the individual worker. Most employers expect their workers to use common sense and courtesy and stay home when they are very sick.

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