

Businesses should plan for flu disruptions, doctor says

January 18 2013



Start by encouraging workers to use sick days.

(HealthDay)—With flu widespread throughout the United States this season, businesses need to prepare to deal with productivity challenges, a doctor advises.

"An organization can be severely impacted by people coming to work when they're sick," Dr. Mary Capelli-Schellpfeffer, medical director of Loyola University Health System Occupational Health Services, said in a health system news release.

"We know illness can spread from person to person, causing entire work groups to be affected. But less obvious is how job performance, organization, productivity, creativity and [financial stability](#) can all be affected," she added.

Worker illness can reduce productivity by causing a distraction and

leading the sick employees and colleagues to focus on the illness instead of their jobs.

"Encourage employees who are sick to use their sick time. Some don't know they have it because they've never had to use it," Capelli-Schellpfeffer said. "Put a plan in place now so if you have a deadline there are procedures in place—like how to work from home. By making small changes, we can protect each other and our businesses."

She offered the following tips to help businesses protect themselves from a [flu outbreak](#):

- Make sure that workers know about the company's attendance policy and designate a person to handle questions. Provide workers with examples of when they should stay home because of illness.
- Prepare for unexpected worker absences, such as when workers are ill or have to stay home to care for [sick children](#). Be sure to have a plan in place to meet staffing needs in such cases.
- Keep your workplace clean. Regular surface cleaning reduces workers' exposure to germs. Eliminating clutter on counters, especially around sinks and food preparation areas, makes it easier to clean these areas.
- Promote good health. This includes having a [prevention program](#) that offers annual flu shots, informs employees about ways to stay healthy and how to avoid infectious illnesses. Put up posters to remind workers to wash their hands before meals, after sneezing and coughing, and when moving between tasks.

"Though there is a cost involved in promoting wellness, it is small in comparison to the pricey hit companies take when their workforce is impaired by illness. A [flu shot](#) program is an investment that yields big

returns for businesses," Capelli-Schellpfeffer said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about the [flu and flu vaccine](#).

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Citation: Businesses should plan for flu disruptions, doctor says (2013, January 18) retrieved 21 November 2023 from

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