

Hygiene in the Workplace

This Everyday Safety Tailgate Talk is written using information from the US Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Centers for Disease Control, and the New York State Department of Health

Good hygiene in the workplace is essential for maintaining a healthy environment for all employees and limiting the spread of illness. There are several things employers can do to ensure that workers are practicing proper hygiene while also ensuring that facilities are sanitary.

WORKER HYGIENE

Hand Washing

Proper hand washing is the single most important way to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases. Hand washing is an activity that should always be done before beginning work and should be repeated frequently throughout the day. It is especially critical after performing any of the following activities:

- Before and after using the restroom
- Eating foods or drinking beverages
- Returning to work after a break
- Coughing, sneezing or blowing the nose
- Touching dirty surfaces, equipment or utensils
- Handling dirty materials, trash, garbage, or waste
- Performing maintenance on any equipment
- Before and after treating a wound (yourself or others)



There is a Right Way to Wash Your Hands!

Follow these five steps every time:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Recognizing Illness

It is important to properly self-evaluate when you are showing signs of illness. Symptoms of respiratory illness include:

- Cough,
- Sneezing,
- Nasal discharge,
- Nasal congestion,
- Runny nose,
- Fever,
- Scratchy or sore throat, and
- Nasal breathing

Workers who are ill should stay home and, if a worker shows signs of illness during the workday, they should report their illness to supervisors and go home.

Coughing & Sneezing

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your elbow. Be sure to practice proper etiquette when coughing or sneezing, turn away from others and cover your face. Always wash your hands after coughing or sneezing into them. Social distancing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the transmission of disease.

WORKPLACE SANITATION

- Restroom facilities should be well-maintained and regularly cleaned. Restrooms should be well-stocked with disinfecting soap and/or hand sanitizers that have an alcohol concentration of at least 60%. Restroom facilities should be sanitized with disinfectant on a regular schedule.
- Frequently clean all commonly touched work surfaces, work areas, and equipment (e.g., telephones, doorknobs, lunch areas, countertops, copiers, etc.). Use disinfecting cleaning agents and follow the directions on the label.
- Ensure there is potable water available for employees on worksites and discourage workers from sharing of drinks, water, and water containers with other employees.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Encourage sick workers to stay home. The CDC recommends that workers who have a fever and respiratory symptoms stay at home until 24 hours after their fever ends (100 degrees Fahrenheit [37.8 degrees Celsius] or lower), without the use of medication. Other symptoms could include a runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.
- Develop flexible leave policies that encourage workers to stay home, without penalty, if they are sick. Discuss other human resource policies with staff, including administrative leave transfer between employees, pay policy for sick leave, childcare options, and what to do when ill during travel.
- Develop a policy for workers and clients who become ill in the workplace.
- Develop a policy on how to deal with workers and clients who may be ill with the flu or other illnesses and communicate it to your workers.
- Determine who will be responsible for assisting ill individuals in the workplace and make sure that at least one person can serve as the “go to” person if someone becomes sick in the workplace.
- Consider how to separate ill workers from others, or give them a surgical mask to wear, if possible and if they can tolerate it, until they can go home.

Resources and References:

OSHA Employer Guidance on the Seasonal Flu

<https://www.osha.gov/dts/guidance/flu/nonhealthcare.html>

OSHA Standards on General Environmental Controls

<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1910/1910.141>

CDC Water, Sanitation, and Environmentally-Related Hygiene Training and Education

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/training-education.html>

