

Planning for the Flu Season

Many employers may not realize the impact that the flu season can have on their company. If a major influenza outbreak hits your community, you may face highly elevated employee absenteeism rates, which could lead to business interruption and lost production. Being prepared for a possible severe outbreak in your community will help ensure that your business runs as smoothly as possible throughout the flu season.

Prevention

As an employer, there are steps you can take to help your employees avoid catching seasonal influenza. Stress the importance of washing hands thoroughly and often, and consider providing hand sanitizer in common areas. Emphasize other personal health strategies, such as avoiding touching one's nose, mouth or eyes and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue.

Make sure that commonly touched objects like elevator buttons, door knobs and keyboards are disinfected frequently. Encourage employees to get vaccinated against seasonal flu each year, and consider offering seasonal flu shots in your workplace.

Keep employees educated on prevention techniques, and encourage them to apply those strategies to their own households as well.

Preparing for an Outbreak

Influenza is spread easily through person-to-person contact, so the best way to prevent the spread of it in your workplace is for sick employees to stay home until their symptoms are gone.

It is essential to review your company's policies to ensure enough flexibility to meet the challenges that each flu season may present. Sick leave policies should be accommodating, non-punitive and well-communicated to encourage ill employees to stay home and allow employees to care for sick family members.

Consider implementing plans for such employees to work remotely from home if possible. By accommodating ill employees or employees with ill family members, you can keep business interruption to a minimum while also avoiding the spread of influenza throughout your workplace.

You may not realize the huge impact that the flu season could have on your business, but preparation now can minimize business interruption during an outbreak.

It is important that all employees completely understand the sick leave policies and any new provisions in place, so if the flu hits, they are informed and prepared.

In addition, you should create contingency plans for essential operations and job duties, so your operations run smoothly even in the event of absences.

Containing a Local Outbreak

There is a strong likelihood that your workplace will experience seasonal flu occurrences at some point during

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the fall or winter season. Encourage all ill employees to stay home until their symptoms subside. Try to be flexible with ill employees or employees who must stay home to care for their family members. If employees feel pressured to work through their illness, it will likely spread around your workplace, and you may face even more employee absence.

If your community is experiencing increased flu occurrences, you may consider canceling nonessential face-to-face meetings and travel to avoid close contact between employees. Take advantage of telecommuting, email and other remote conferencing options.