



Loss Control Insight

Don't Get Bugged by Workplace Germs

You go to work in the morning planning to bring home nothing more than your pay. Unfortunately, you occasionally also pick up a cold, the flu or much worse infections. Depending on your particular workplace, the infection control policy will have a certain emphasis. In many workplaces, the spread of everyday infections such as colds and the flu will be the main concern. In plants with shower facilities and change rooms, infections such as athlete's foot may be a problem. In other workplaces such as health care facilities, fatal diseases such as HIV (which causes AIDS) and Hepatitis B will be of paramount importance.

Here are some things you can do that might cut your chances of catching a bug at work or elsewhere:

- Keep your body's own immune system in good shape. You need to get enough sleep and exercise on a regular basis. Eat a well-balanced diet, including enough foods containing Vitamin C - such as citrus fruits. Don't smoke.
 - It's not always possible to do so, but avoid other people's colds if you can.
 - If you have a cold, dispose of tissues in a sanitary manner so other people are not exposed.
 - When you sneeze or cough, cover your mouth and direct the blast away from other people. Colds spread through the air from one person to another.
 - Wash your hands frequently when you are ill or exposed to illness. The viruses which cause colds are often spread when your hand, which has just touched a germ-laden doorknob or other object, touches your eye, nose or mouth.
 - Wash your hands before eating and after using the toilet. This can help prevent upset digestive systems.
 - Certain jobs, in health care and food services, for example, have a need for lengthy hand-washing procedures. Be sure to follow the instructions on how to do this.
 - Do your part to keep washrooms, lunchrooms and work areas clean and dry to help prevent the spread of illnesses. Wash cups, dishes and eating utensils in hot soapy water and rinse well in clear hot water.
 - Athlete's foot, an unpleasant fungus infection, spreads easily in moist shower areas and change rooms. Don't walk barefoot in these areas; instead, wear shower sandals. Keep your feet clean and dry. Don't share footwear.
 - In some jobs such as food preparation you may be required to wear protective clothing to prevent the spread of disease. A mask, head covering, and gloves may be required for certain tasks.
 - Health care work requires stringent measures to protect the worker and prevent diseases from spreading. Be sure to follow any procedures for infection control. These are designed to protect against many illnesses, including life-threatening ones such as AIDS and Hepatitis B.
- Even minor illnesses can create something of a safety risk. When you are sick, even with a common cold, you are likely to feel distracted and less alert.

If you are taking certain cold remedies, you may be increasing the risk to your safety. Some remedies contain alcohol, antihistamines, codeine or other substances which can actually cause impairment. If you think you might not be alert enough to do your job safely, talk to your supervisor.

Infection control is part of your safety responsibility here at work. If you are feeling ill or taking medicine, keep in mind you may not be sharp enough to work or drive safely.