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Keeping the Workplace Well This Winter!

As the “official” start of the cold and flu season approaches, the Centers for Disease Control reminds us that by taking a few basic precautions at work, we can minimize the chances of acquiring or spreading illness to our co-workers and loved ones at home.

Practice “preventive maintenance” during the winter months. You do it with your car, so do it with your body! Get extra rest, focus on good nutrition (fruits, vegetables, protein) and get your flu shot.

“Listen” to your body. Unexplained fatigue, loss of appetite and sudden body aches may be signs of an impending flu or virus. By taking especially good care of yourself during the early onset of these symptoms, you may be successful in minimizing the severity and duration of your illness. Ask your healthcare provider if antiviral drugs might be indicated. These are prescription drugs which can treat the flu if given at the start of the illness.

Wash your hands well and frequently. The CDC indicates that the most germ-infested objects in the workplace are doorknobs, computer keyboards and shared telephones. To keep healthy in this environment, it is important to wash your hands throughout the workday, especially before eating or snacking and following bathroom visits. Researchers have found that the most effective washing technique involves lathering up with virtually any kind of soap and “vigorously” rubbing the hands together (while counting from 1 to 20) then rinsing with warm to hot water. It is the friction caused by rubbing soapy hands that kills germs and bacteria.

Don’t self-infect. Make a special effort to avoid touching your face, eyes or nose and cover any cuts or skin splits on your hands (no matter how minor they appear) with bandages.

Don’t unnecessarily infect others. If you’re feeling ill, don’t volunteer to assist in handling food or setting up for the coming holiday parties with co-workers. And if your symptoms have become pronounced, consider staying home. You’re not doing anyone a favor by dragging yourself into the workplace when you’re just too sick to be productive.

While it may not be possible to avoid every cold and flu, we can greatly reduce the rate of infections by practicing “preventive health etiquette” at work. For the most current information on colds and flu, visit www.cdc.gov/flu.