

Infectious Disease: Reducing the Risk of Exposure in the Workplace

The best strategy to reduce risk during an infectious disease pandemic is to avoid crowded settings and physically close interactions that increase the risk of exposure to someone who may be infected. If it is necessary to be in a crowded setting, and amidst people, the time spent in a crowd should be as short as possible. Some basic hygiene and social distancing precautions that can be implemented in every workplace include the following:

- Encourage sick employees to stay at home
- Encourage employees to wash their hands frequently with soap and water or with hand sanitizer if there is no soap or water available. Also, encourage your employees to avoid touching their noses, mouths, and eyes
- Encourage employees to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or to cough and sneeze into their upper sleeves if tissues are not available. All employees should wash their hands or use a hand sanitizer after they cough, sneeze or blow their noses
- Employees should avoid close contact with their coworkers and customers (maintain a separation of at least six feet). They should avoid shaking hands and always wash their hands after contact with others. Even if employees wear gloves, they should wash their hands upon removal of the gloves in case their hand(s) became contaminated during the removal process
- Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles and with a place to wash or disinfect their hands
- Keep work surfaces, telephones, computer equipment and other frequently touched surfaces and office equipment clean. Be sure that any cleaner used is safe and will not harm your employees or your office equipment. Use only disinfectants registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and follow all directions and safety precautions indicated on the label
- Discourage your employees from using other employees' phones, desks, offices or other work tools and equipment
- Minimize situations where groups of people are crowded together, such as in a meeting. Use e-mail, phones and text messages to communicate with each other. When meetings are necessary, avoid close contact by keeping a separation of at least six feet, where possible, and assure that there is proper ventilation in the meeting room





- Reduce or eliminate unnecessary social interactions to help control the spread of infectious diseases. Reconsider all situations that permit or require employees, customers, and visitors (including family members) to enter the workplace. Workplaces which permit family visitors on site should consider restricting or eliminating that option during an infectious disease pandemic. Work sites with on-site day care should consider in advance whether these facilities will remain open or will be closed, and the impact of such decisions on employees and the business
- Limit larger social gatherings
- Promote healthy lifestyles, including good nutrition, exercise, and smoking cessation. A person's overall health impacts their body's immune system and can affect their ability to fight off, or recover from, an infectious disease

The risk for infection can be reduced through a combination of actions. No single action provides complete protection, but a combined approach can help decrease the likelihood of transmission.

Additional information is also available from the World Health Organization (WHO), which can be accessed at www.who.int.

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