

Tips to Help Businesses Beat the Flu Season

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WILMINGTON, Mass., Dec. 27, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Flu season is back, and it can cost U.S. businesses billions of dollars in sick days and lost productivity if not carefully managed in an office environment or workplace. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), flu activity most commonly peaks in the U.S. between December and February. However, seasonal flu activity can begin as early as October and continue to occur as late as May.



The CDC cites the annual direct costs for the flu in the U.S., such as hospital and doctors' office visits and medications, as an estimated \$4.6 billion. The flu causes U.S. employees to miss approximately 17 million workdays, at an estimated \$7 billion a year in sick days and lost productivity.

"Businesses should be proactive in helping keep workers and customers safe from getting the flu virus by taking steps to help prevent the spread of germs in their facilities," says Adam Soreff, director of marketing and communications at UniFirst Corporation, a leading provider of work uniforms and facility service products to businesses throughout the North America. "This is the time of year when our facility service and hygiene programs see a marked increase in demand for such items as alcohol-based hand sanitizers, like Purell®, anti-bacterial hand soaps, disinfecting cleaning products, hands-free soap and paper dispensers, and touch-free faucets and flushers."

The following are some helpful tips to help prevent work environments from becoming a breeding ground for germs that can cause the flu and other seasonal illnesses.

1. Educate employees about the importance of regular hand washing. Additionally, businesses should provide employees and customers with hand sanitizer dispensers and/or wipes where soap and water are unavailable. Alcohol-based gel and foam sanitizers are proven to be effective at killing viruses that cause both common colds and the flu (for maximum effectiveness, these products should contain 60% to 95% ethanol or isopropanol).
2. Encourage employees to get a flu shot. The flu vaccine provides the best defense against contracting the virus, according to the CDC. The more people who get vaccinated, the more difficult it is for influenza to spread through communities. The CDC has found that the flu vaccine can reduce a person's risk of getting the flu by as much as 40–60 percent. Some companies make getting the flu shot easy and convenient by offering on-site flu-shot clinics for employees.
3. Discourage employees from coming into **close contact with anyone with flu-like symptoms**. The flu virus is highly contagious, so avoiding contact with colleagues, friends, or family members with the virus can help reduce the risk of catching the flu. **Encourage employees to take sick days when they truly need them.**
4. Provide routine office cleaning that includes disinfecting surfaces and objects in work and public areas that may be contaminated with germs like the flu. Pay special attention to doorknobs, keyboards, and phones.
5. Make sure work environments have an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, disposable wipes, and other facility service and hygiene products. Many employers turn to facility service providers, like UniFirst, to help ensure ancillary products are delivered on regular schedules so they're always stocked and available when needed.

"Comprehensive facility service programs can play an important role in the battle against the spread of seasonal illnesses," added Soreff. "Many of our business customers also find that having Purell sanitizer and wipes readily available has added benefits by creating positive impressions with both staff and customers. In fact, customers are often quite appreciative when places of business show such commitment to creating and maintaining cleaner and healthier environments."

By following these tips, businesses can feel confident that they are truly helping their employees and customers stay healthy during the cold and flu

season.

About UniFirst:

Headquartered in Wilmington, Mass., UniFirst Corporation (NYSE: UNF) is a North American leader in the supply and servicing of uniform and workwear programs, as well as the delivery of facility service programs. Together with its subsidiaries, the company also provides first aid and safety products, and manages specialized garment programs for the cleanroom and nuclear industries. UniFirst manufactures its own branded workwear, protective clothing, and floorcare products; and with more than 250 service locations, over 300,000 customer locations, and 14,000-plus employee Team Partners, the company outfits nearly 2 million workers each business day. For more information, contact UniFirst at 800.455.7654 or visit UniFirst.com.



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