



## **Toolbox Talk: Preventing the Spread of Illness in the Workplace**

### **Why this matters**

There has been an increase in respiratory illnesses and viruses circulating recently. When sickness spreads through a workplace, it affects employee health, productivity, and safety. Even mild symptoms can impact focus, reaction time, and job performance—especially in environments involving equipment, driving, or physical labor.

Our goal is to prevent illness where possible and reduce transmission when someone does get sick.

### **Common illnesses currently circulating**

- Seasonal flu
- Common cold
- RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)
- COVID-19 and similar respiratory viruses
- Stomach viruses (norovirus)

### **Most spread through:**

- Airborne droplets from coughing/sneezing
- Touching contaminated surfaces
- Close contact with sick individuals

### **How illness spreads at work**

Viruses move quickly in shared environments through:

- Shared tools and equipment
- Breakrooms and common areas
- Handshakes and close conversations
- Poor ventilation
- Employees working while sick

### **Prevention: What we can all do**

1) Stay home when you're sick

- Do not come to work with fever, vomiting, or severe symptoms.
- Communicate with your supervisor early.
- Returning too soon can infect the entire team.

## **2) Practice good hand hygiene**

- Wash hands regularly (20 seconds minimum).
- Use sanitizer when washing isn't available.
- Wash after using shared tools, breaks/meals, and coughing/sneezing.

## **3) Cover coughs and sneezes**

- Use your elbow or a tissue.
- Dispose of tissues immediately.
- Wash/sanitize hands afterward.

## **4) Clean shared surfaces and equipment**

- Wipe down tools, forklifts, workstations, door handles, and breakroom tables.
- Disinfect at the start and end of shifts.

## **5) Maintain distance when possible**

- Avoid close contact when someone shows symptoms.
- Be mindful in meetings, vehicles, and tight workspaces.

## **6) Use PPE when appropriate**

- Masks when sick or around sick individuals.
- Gloves when cleaning contaminated surfaces.

## **If you start feeling sick at work**

- Notify your supervisor immediately.
- Limit contact with others.
- Clean your work area before leaving if possible.
- Go home and rest.

## **Supervisor responsibilities**

- Encourage employees to report symptoms.
- Avoid pressuring sick employees to work.
- Ensure cleaning supplies are available.
- Reinforce communication expectations for call-offs and late arrivals.

## **Safety reminder**

Working while sick is a safety risk:

- Reduced alertness
- Slower reaction times
- Higher chance of mistakes and injuries

**Protecting your health protects your coworkers and the company.**

**Discussion questions for the team**

1. What areas in our workplace are most likely to spread germs?
2. Do we have enough cleaning supplies and sanitizer available?
3. What can we improve about communicating when someone is sick?
4. What steps will each of us take this week to reduce spread?

**Key takeaway**

Preventing illness is a team effort. Stay home when sick, practice hygiene, clean shared spaces, and communicate early. These small actions keep everyone safer and the workplace running smoothly.