



TOP COMPLIANCE (Pty) Ltd

Your Business' Safety Is Our Concern

QSE B-BBEE - Level Four

Website: www.topcompliance.co.za

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Workplace hygiene to prevent illness and contamination

As the cold and influenza season is upon us, maintaining a clean and hygienic workplace becomes even more important. The spread of viruses and bacteria can lead to increased absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced productivity, and a general decline in employee health and wellbeing. Implementing good hygiene practices can significantly reduce the transmission of illness and create a safer work environment.

The common cold and influenza (flu) are both respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses and have distinct characteristics. Understanding the differences between these two can help in managing symptoms, preventing spread, and seeking appropriate medical care.

Causes

Common Cold: Caused by a variety of viruses, most commonly rhinoviruses. Other viruses such as coronaviruses (different from COVID-19), adenoviruses, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can also cause colds.

Influenza: Caused by influenza viruses, primarily influenza A and influenza B. These viruses can undergo genetic changes, leading to new strains and potentially causing seasonal flu outbreaks.

Symptoms

Common Cold:

- Gradual onset of symptoms.
- Mild symptoms include a runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, sneezing, mild cough, and mild body aches.
- Generally does not cause fever in adults, though children may have a slight fever.
- Symptoms usually last for 7-10 days but can linger longer in some cases.

Influenza:

- Sudden onset of symptoms.
- More severe symptoms include high fever, chills, severe body and muscle aches, fatigue, headache, dry cough, sore throat, nausea and vomiting.
- Can lead to complications such as pneumonia, especially in young children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic health conditions.

- Symptoms usually last for 1-2 weeks, but fatigue and weakness can persist longer.

Transmission

Common Cold: Spreads through droplets from coughs and sneezes, touching contaminated surfaces, and direct contact with an infected person.

Influenza: Spreads similarly through respiratory droplets, contact with contaminated surfaces, and close contact with infected individuals. The flu is highly contagious and can spread rapidly, particularly in crowded settings.

Prevention

Common Cold:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water.
- Avoiding close contact with infected individuals.
- Using tissues or elbows to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Keeping hands away from the face, especially the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Influenza:

- Annual flu vaccination is the most effective prevention method.
- Frequent handwashing and use of hand sanitizers.
- Avoiding close contact with infected individuals.
- Covering coughs and sneezes and using masks in high-risk settings.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle to support the immune system.

Treatment

Common Cold:

- There is no specific antiviral treatment but the focus is on the relieving of symptoms.
- Over-the-counter medications can help alleviate symptoms like congestion, cough, and sore throat.
- Rest, hydration, and home remedies like warm saltwater gargles can provide relief.

Influenza:

- Antiviral medications (e.g., oseltamivir, zanamivir) can reduce the severity and duration of symptoms if taken within 48 hours of onset.
- Over-the-counter medications can help manage symptoms.
- Rest, hydration, and supportive care are important for recovery.
- Severe cases, particularly those with complications, may require hospitalization.

Complications

Common Cold: Rarely leads to serious complications, though it can occasionally result in secondary infections such as sinusitis or ear infections.

Influenza: Can lead to serious complications, including pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infections, and exacerbation of chronic medical conditions. High-risk groups include young children, the elderly, pregnant people.

While the common cold and influenza share some symptoms, they differ significantly in their severity, causes, and potential complications. Recognizing these differences is crucial for effective treatment and

prevention, especially during the peak cold and flu season. Maintaining good hygiene practices and consider getting vaccinated against the flu may help protect against these common respiratory illnesses.

The importance of [risk assessments](#) and the role of [safety representatives](#) in maintaining hygiene within the workplace during the cold and influenza season is very important.

1. Proper cleaning and disinfecting. During the winter months increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting high-contact surfaces such as door handles, light switches, desks, keyboards, phones, and communal areas like break rooms and restrooms. Ensure that cleaning staff use proper disinfectants effective against viruses such as bleach or products containing Sodium Hypochlorite. Download the Material Safety Data Sheet of the product you use to ensure that manufacturer specifications are adhered to, and that cleaning staff understand the possible risk and the PPE requirements if applicable.
2. Promote good hand hygiene practices. Ensure that handwashing facilities are well-stocked with soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizers. Place hand sanitizers with at least 70% alcohol content at key locations such as entrances, meeting rooms, and near shared equipment. Avoid using the air blowers to dry your hands as they potentially spread bacteria and viruses. Educate employees on proper handwashing techniques, using soap and water and washing for at least 20 seconds, rinsing thoroughly, and drying hands completely. Display posters and send reminders to reinforce this practice.
3. Encourage respiratory etiquette by advising staff to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their elbow when coughing or sneezing. Provide tissues and no-touch disposal bins throughout the workplace. Consider implementing a policy for wearing masks, especially in crowded or enclosed spaces, to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets.
4. Healthy workplace practices were the employees to stay home if they feel unwell or exhibit symptoms of a cold or the flu. If possible, to offer remote work options for staff that are ill to minimize the number of people in the workplace and reduce the potential spread of illness.
5. Appropriate food handling and hygiene in break areas. Make certain that kitchen and break areas are cleaned and disinfected daily. Provide cleaning supplies for employees to wipe down surfaces before and after use. Implement guidelines for safe food storage and disposal. Employees are to take their food and containers home with them after their shift.
6. Efficient waste management by emptying waste bins frequently to prevent overflow and contamination. Use bins with lids to contain waste and reduce exposure to germs. Bins in the rest areas and food facilities to be emptied and disinfected on a daily basis due to the potential for contamination.
7. Good cross ventilation and air quality. Ensure that the HVAC system (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) is properly maintained as per the manufacturers safety data sheet. Do not set the HVAC system to higher than 22 degrees Celsius, as these higher temperatures encourage the growth and spread of bacteria and viruses. Where possible, increase the amount of fresh air circulating in the workplace by opening windows or using ventilation systems that bring in outside air to reduce the amount of airborne viral particles that can be inhaled and cause illness.
8. Employee health education and training awareness programs should be conduct regularly pertaining to good hygiene practices, recognizing symptoms of colds and flu, and preventative measures. Provide educational materials such as pamphlets and online resources. Consider hosting an on-site flu vaccination clinic or providing information about local vaccination services.

9. [Conducting Risk Assessments](#) to identify potential health hazards related to cold and influenza season to identify and assess areas where employees are most vulnerable and implement targeted measures to mitigate these risks. Use the findings from risk assessments to update hygiene policies and procedures and ensure they are effective and comprehensive. Engage employees in the assessment process to gather insights and improve overall workplace safety.
10. [Safety Representatives' Responsibilities](#) play a crucial role in maintaining workplace hygiene. They help identify hazards, conduct inspections, and ensure compliance with health and safety regulations. They are the liaison between employees and management, communicating concerns and suggestions related to workplace hygiene. They help foster a culture of safety by promoting best practices and encouraging employee participation in health initiatives. They assist in organizing and delivering training sessions on hygiene practices, emergency procedures, and the importance of vaccinations. Ensure that all employees understand and adhere to the established safety policies and procedures.

By observing to these best practices, including the crucial steps of conducting risk assessments and leveraging the role of safety representatives, workplaces can create a healthier environment that minimizes the spread of cold and flu viruses. Prioritizing hygiene not only protects the well-being of employees but also maintains productivity and morale during the difficult cold and influenza season.

"Prevention is better than cure." – Desiderius Erasmus

<u>Occupational health and safety auditing and consulting</u>			<u>Online safety shop</u>
			
<u>First aid equipment</u>	<u>Signage</u>	<u>Legal posters</u>	<u>Safety Equipment</u>

Courses offered by Top Compliance (Pty) Ltd

ONLINE ACADEMY - https://academy.topcompliance.co.za/
Occupational Health and Safety Courses
<u>Safety representative – Legal Liability</u>
<u>The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability</u>
<u>Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment</u>
<u>Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638</u>
<u>Basic Ladder Safety Course</u>

Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	

ONSITE TRAINING	
First Aid Courses:	
Level 1 - US 119567 - Perform basic life support and first aid procedures	2 days
Level 2 - US 120496 - Provide risk-based primary emergency care/first aid in the workplace	3 days
Level 3 - US 376480 - Provide first aid as an advanced first responder	3 days
Level 1 & 2 - US 119567 & 120496	3 days
Level 1, 2 & 3 - US 119567, 120496 & 376480	5 days
Level 2 & 3 - US 120496 & 376480	3 days
Child and infant CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking	6 hours
Adult CPR & choking and AED	1 day
Occupational Health and Safety Courses	
Safety representative – Legal Liability	1 day
The Occupational Health and Safety Act & responsibilities of management – Legal Liability	1 day
Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment	1 day
Food facility health & safety course in terms of R638	6 hours
Basic Ladder Safety	6 hours
Fire Fighting and Prevention Courses	
Fire Marshal - Basic firefighting	6 hours
Fire & Evacuation marshal - Basic firefighting with emergency action planning	1 day