

# Sick? Stay home!

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The deadline is looming, rumors of layoffs are swarming and you get the flu. Think the heroic thing to do is to go in and “work through the pain?” Wrong! According to Dr. Mary Capelli-Schellpfeffer, medical director of Loyola University Health System Occupational Health Services, people who come to work sick are more likely to hinder than help their company.

“An organization can be severely impacted by people coming to work when they’re sick. We know illness can spread from person to person causing entire work groups to be impacted. But less obvious is how job performance, organization, productivity, creativity and financial stability can all be affected,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer.

People often think because they wash their hands or take over-the-counter medications, they aren’t spreading the illness. Not so.

“Just being in a room and breathing when a person is sick can spread the illness not to mention coughing and sneezing. If you’re sick you shouldn’t be in the workplace. It interrupts business and puts others at risk of infection,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer.

Sickness can interrupt productivity by creating a distraction and causing both the infected person and coworkers to focus on the illness instead of their jobs.

It also blurs the lines between personal and professional lives and relationships.

“It’s good for people to feel like a team and care about each other, but it’s not healthy for people to be invasive of each other’s privacy, including their medical privacy,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer. “It disrupts the interactions of the team and can be corrosive, even setting the stage for future judgments, misunderstandings and biases.”

Illness in the workplace can affect how outsiders such as clients and customers view the stability of the company as well.

“If you contact a company and are greeted by someone coughing and sneezing, what is your initial reaction? It takes away from the integrity of the company brand and causes people to look at an organization in a way that was not intended,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer. “If the person on the other end of the line is sick it can bring into question the stability of the company as well. ‘How much is the company hurting if they have sick employees working?’”

Still, calling in sick can feel like an automatic job-eliminator for many in this turbulent economy. Some may feel staying home with the [flu](#) makes one look weak and uncommitted when trying to appear strong and highly devoted. To ensure an environment of wellness and productivity, managers need to keep an open dialogue with employees about attendance policies and sick days.

“Encourage employees who are sick to use their sick time. Many don’t know they have it because they’ve never had to use it,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer. “Make sure to plan ahead so if you have a deadline there are procedures in place - like how to work from home. By making small changes and preparing for illness we can protect each other and our businesses.”

If someone in the workplace has been sick Capelli-Schellpfeffer offers these common sense, but often forgotten, tips to limit the spread of

disease:

1. Wipe down all surfaces, especially shared surfaces such as copy machines.
2. Let space be your friend: Having 6-8 feet between you and a sick person can reduce the chance you too will become sick.
3. Keep food and beverages away from work areas of sick employees, including offices and cubicles.
4. Implement a wellness agenda that includes an annual flu shot.

“While news cycles and the public’s attention span about the flu rises and wanes, the flu is not going away and most likely will only get worse this fall,” said Capelli-Schellpfeffer. “Though there is a cost involved in promoting wellness, it is small in comparison to the pricey hit companies take when their workforce is impaired by illness. A flu shot program is an investment that yields big returns for businesses.”

Provided by Loyola University

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