How to keep sick employees home this winter

While you want your employees at work as much as possible, the pandemic has brought new meaning to the importance of sick workers staying home when they don't feel well. You might have been more flexible with allowing under the weather employees to continue working in the office in the past. However, the primary goal now is to keep sick employees home to protect others' health and safety in the building.

You can utilize this article as a guide to how to keep sick employees home.

The impact of the pandemic on sick leave

The cold and flu season of 2020 will look different than that of years prior. In the past, employees could struggle through their day with tissues, tea, and cough drops, as long as they could get the job done. Now, every sneeze, cough, and fever comes with the possibility of a COVID-19 infection.

That pushes employers to want sick employees to stay home; however, some guidelines must be followed and best practices to be enacted to ensure that you uphold your employee's rights while still keeping those at your building safe from possible COVID-19 infection.

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Dos of keeping sick employees home

Do keep communication open

You want employees with symptoms to notify their supervisor and stay home. These symptoms can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

Do follow CDC recommended steps

Employees should remain at home until the CDC recommended self-isolation standards have been met, or they've consulted with a healthcare provider about their condition.

Do educate about FMLA

Legislation was signed into law in March 2020, allowing many employees to receive paid sick leave when affected by the coronavirus. The coverage includes 80 hours of paid leave if

- They have symptoms of COVID-19
- A medical provider has recommended self-isolation
- They need to care for a relative
- Their child's school or child-care service is closed
- The government has ordered them to quarantine

With this information in mind, sick employees might feel more comfortable staying home knowing they won't miss out on their income.

Do conduct contact tracing

If an employee is at home due to a COVID-19 diagnosis or possible infection, you want to conduct contract tracing to identify and isolate affected co-workers and customers. Those co-workers should also stay home until proper actions have been taken to ensure they can return to work.

Do offer work from home opportunities

Some employees will feel too ill to continue working, while others will feel just fine. For those who feel fine, you can offer work from home opportunities. This allows them to avoid missing income from days off from work and you to continue having the necessary tasks completed. Be sure to offer this as an option instead of waiting for employees to ask if it's possible. Again, if employees know they won't miss out on pay, they are more likely to be open to staying home when sick.

Do inform about paid time off

You should be clear about sick leave and other paid time off opportunities available. Having this information on hand will empower employees to make the right decision when feeling under the weather.

Do remain flexible

These are unprecedented times for us all. One of the best tips for helping your sick employees stay home is being flexible. Consider the case by case basis and guidelines you must follow to keep everyone safe.

Tips to keep employees well

Along with keeping sick employees home, one of your most essential duties as an employer is to reduce the

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spread of germs while in the workplace. Here are some tips to keep top of mind.

- **Maintain cleanliness:** You want to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces throughout the building. That includes workstations, keyboards, phones, handrails, and doorknobs. The key here is to both clean and disinfect. They are not the same. You should use disinfectants that meet the EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- **Avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth, and unwashed hands:** While masks should be used throughout the workday, during times when masks are removed, such as during lunchtime or while drinking, be sure to avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Cover mouth and nose with tissue:** Similar to the above point, if your mask is off during the day and you cough or sneeze, be sure to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, followed by throwing the tissue in the garbage and washing your hands.
- **Wear a mask:** Masks should be worn in the building throughout the day when you can't social distance. Have extra masks on hand for those who forget to wear theirs.
- **Avoid sharing equipment:** While this is sometimes unavoidable when at all possible, you want to avoid sharing equipment. This includes phones, desks, offices, and work tools. If it is required, the equipment should be cleaned and disinfected before and after each use.
- **Practice social distancing:** Social distancing is one of the keys to maintaining a healthy work environment. Not only should you avoid large gatherings at work, but when at all possible, everyone should maintain a distance of 6 feet from others, especially when not wearing masks.
- **Wash hands regularly:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- **Communicate about sick family members:** If family members are at home sick with COVID-19, be sure to inform your supervisor and discuss the next steps.

Keeping sick employees home protects everyone

As we all continue to navigate the world with COVID-19, we all must work together to keep ourselves and those around us safe. That includes keeping sick employees home to reduce transmission. Open communication and implementing best practices for safety and wellness will help us do just that.

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