



Industry Update



November 2007

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Top Five Steps for Employers to Minimize Flu-Related Costs in the Workplace this Flu Season

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Have the sounds of sniffing and coughing begun to drown out the usual noises of your workplace? If these noises have not yet invaded the normal din of your office, they likely will if you are not properly prepared for the upcoming flu season. The flu season typically spans from November through March, and according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), between 10 and 20 percent of Americans will be ill with the flu (short for influenza) this season. Moderate estimates put the annual cost of the flu to U.S. businesses at more than \$100 billion in health care expenditures and lost productivity. In order to decrease the high costs associated with the flu to businesses, there are a handful of steps employers must take to educate employees about the flu, prevent employees from becoming ill with the flu, and minimize the spread of the flu among employees.

Step 1: Offer a flu-vaccination program to all employees.

The first step employers can take to minimize the cost of the flu to their companies is to reduce the likelihood that employees will become ill with the flu in the first place by offering a flu-vaccination program. A flu-vaccination program may consist of reimbursing employees for getting flu shots at a local clinic or arranging for a flu-vaccine provider to administer flu-shots at your workplace.

According to the CDC, the most effective way for individuals to protect themselves from the flu is through the flu shot. In fact, the flu shot vaccine is anywhere from 70 to 90 percent effective in preventing the flu depending on whether or not a recipient is considered high-risk for the illness. As a result, the small up-front investment in flu shots for all interested employees is minimal in comparison to the benefit of reducing the number of employees who will miss work because of the flu over the entire flu season that the investment creates.

Step 2: Educate employees about flu-preventative good health habits and how to stop the spread of flu germs.

The second step employers can take to reduce their exposure to flu-related losses is to educate employees about good health habits and how to prevent the spread of flu germs. In a typical workplace, employees often work together in close quarters and share common work tools creating an environment in which germs are easily spread. Educating employees about good health habits ensures that they will be less susceptible to getting the flu, and, that if they do become infected, they will minimize the spread of the flu to individuals they regularly come into close contact with, such as coworkers.

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Some of the good health habit basics employers should promote among employees include: avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home when you are sick, covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you are coughing or sneezing, frequently washing your hands, getting plenty of sleep, maintaining a balanced diet, exercising, and drinking plenty of liquids.

The CDC offers a variety of posters and brochures about good health habits and preventing the spread of germs that employers can download for free from their website at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm. Employers should hang printed copies of the posters in areas such as the break room and main lobby where they can easily be seen by all employees. Employers should also distribute copies of CDC brochures to all employees and encourage them to follow the tips outlined in the brochures to minimize the spread of the flu around the office during the upcoming flu season.

Step 3: Discourage presenteeism among flu-stricken employees.

Encouraging sick employees to stay home from work is another step employers should take to reduce the cost of the flu to their companies. While this tip may seem counteractive to the goal of reducing flu-related costs, such as absences and lost productivity, studies show that ill employees who report to work are generally not as productive as they are when they are completely healthy and, if they are contagious, they increase the likelihood that they will spread their illness to other employees, resulting in more absences overall. In fact, a recent report released by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) showed that the cost of presenteeism, when a sick employee comes to work instead of calling in sick, surpasses the cost of absenteeism to businesses by over \$60 billion annually. It is widely believed that a lack of “no-fault” sick time, or sick time in which employees are not disciplined or not required to provide proof of their sickness for an absence, are at the root of the problem of presenteeism. Employers must evaluate their sick leave policies to ensure that the policies do not encourage sick employees to come to work during flu season.

Step 4: If feasible, allow ill employees or employees with ill dependents to telecommute.

A fourth step employers can take to reduce the losses flu-related absences cause to productivity is to consider offering telecommuting as an option for employees who become ill or have dependents who become ill with the flu. While this option may not be feasible for companies where work is closely tied with equipment, tools, or processes that must remain on-site, if your company can offer telecommuting, you will be able to minimize interruptions to project schedules caused by flu-related absences and reduce the risk that ill employees will come to work and infect other employees.

Step 5: Prepare a staffing contingency plan to maintain production if your workforce is affected by the flu.

Finally, employers should have a staffing contingency plan prepared to minimize losses in case a large number of the workers in their workforce become sick with the flu. The use of temporary staffing or incentives for healthy employees who work overtime to cover for absent employees can help your company maintain production schedules and meet deadlines in the face of an increased number of absences that can often occur during the flu season.

Ultimately, there is no cure for the flu, and, as a result, employers will never be able to eliminate all of the health care costs and losses in productivity associated with the illness. However, employers who are proactive about educating and vaccinating employees and prepared with a contingency plan in case the flu becomes widespread in their workforce can greatly reduce the cost of the flu to their companies.

National Influenza Vaccination Week is November 26-December 2, 2007

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention has declared the week after Thanksgiving, from November 26-December 2, 2007, National Influenza Vaccination Week. During that week, flu vaccine providers will be asked to make flu-shots more readily available by providing them at a greater number of locations and at extended hours of availability. Encourage employees at your company to help prevent the spread of the flu in your office by observing National Influenza Vaccination Week and getting vaccinated!

Thanksgiving Leftovers Recipe: Turkey Wild Rice Casserole

Below is a delicious and easy recipe that uses the leftover turkey from a traditional Thanksgiving table. A great dish to fuel some post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping or to warm up the kitchen on a cold winter afternoon.

Ingredients:

2 Cups-Cooked turkey, cut into bite sized pieces
1 Pkg. - Long grain & wild rice, cooked according to the directions on the package
1/2-Small onion, diced
Diced green pepper- to taste
1 Can-Cream of mushroom soup
1/2 Cup- Milk
Salt & Pepper- to taste
1 Pkg.-Sliced almonds

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix all ingredients together, except almonds, and pour into a casserole baking dish. Bake for 45-50 minutes. Sprinkle sliced almonds over baked casserole. Enjoy!

In the Break Room with Award Staffing: Thanksgiving Photo Hunt

Can you spot all 22 differences between these two photos of a stained glass depiction of the Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving. If you're stumped, call your Award Staffing Account Manager for the solutions to this puzzle at (952)924-9000.



Nominate an Outstanding Award Staffing Employee to be Award's Next Temporary Employee of the Month

Do you have an Award Staffing employee working at your company who deserves to be recognized for his or her great work ethic, positive attitude, perfect attendance record, or outstanding performance? If so, the Award Staffing team would like you to nominate that employee as a candidate for employee of the month.

If the employee you nominate is chosen, he or she will receive a \$50 Visa gift card from Award Staffing in appreciation for a job well-done. Award will also provide a free pizza lunch at the chosen employee's place of assignment as a thanks to the company for nominating the exemplary employee and helping Award ensure that we are able to reward, retain and continue to send our clients only the best talent.

If you would like to nominate an employee, you can do so in one of the following ways:

Call Award Staffing at (952)924-9000 and request to speak with Amy Scalise about nominating an employee for temporary employee of the month.

or

Send an email to ascalise@awardstaffing.com that includes the following information: your company's name, your name, your contact information, the name of the Award employee you'd like to nominate, and a brief paragraph outlining why the employee deserves to be honored as employee of the month.

We look forward to hearing from you if you have an Award employee who continuously sets the bar high for job performance and positive attitude!

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