

Durham businesses should encourage employees to stay home when sick

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By [Melissa Mancini](#)

DURHAM -- Feeling under the weather?

Call in sick to work.

"If people would stay home when they're sick it would help a great deal," said Rouge Valley director of infection control Tricia Root.

Dragging into work with a sore throat or a fever for a big meeting or to meet an important project deadline is a bad idea, considering how easy it is to spread the flu virus and H1N1 (swine flu).

Employers should encourage their workers to stay home, drink fluids and rest when they have the flu. Anybody who feels sick and has symptoms should stay home for a few days, she said.

It's the best way to prevent waves of flu from running through the office.

Employees should protect themselves by following guidelines to avoid the spread of viruses. Most people know they should be sneezing into their sleeves, but many don't know the virus can stay on sleeves for up to eight hours. So the best thing to do is keep tissues around, Ms. Root said.

Two things businesses should consider keeping on hand is a supply of hand sanitizer and a stock of disinfectant wipes. Management should consider having their employees wipe down their work station daily. When an employee calls in sick their work station should be wiped down. Viruses can live on hard surfaces for up to 24 hours.

"We can't be too careful," she said.

Don't panic if an employee gets sick. The flu and H1N1 will pass with some home remedies for most people unless they have significant underlying health problems and their immune systems are compromised.

"Most of us should really just get over it (the virus)," she said.



Photo By Shannon Maguire

PICKERING -- On October 1, members of the Rouge Valley Health System spoke to a group of business representatives about proper handwashing techniques and how to prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus. As part of the seminar, Jayshree Somani, left, demonstrated how to wash hands to Vaughn Lal. October 1, 2009.

Above all the best medicine is to encourage prevention. Employing proper hand-washing techniques will go a long way in preventing the flu, Ms. Root said.

Frequent, proper hand washing is a concept that has to be reinforced throughout the population, said Rouge Valley infection control practitioner Jayshree Somani.

Compliance can be a challenge even among adults, Ms. Somani said. Employers can make the rate of hand washing higher by making sure workers have the tools to wash up: hand sanitizer, plenty of soap and paper towels to dry hands and open doors.

Hand washing should take at least 15 seconds, with people taking care to clean all parts of their hands: between fingers, wrists and finger nails. After hand washing or using sanitizer make sure hands are completely dry before touching anything, Ms. Somani said.

As for getting the vaccine when it becomes available, Ms. Root said that is a decision people can only make for themselves.

"We need to take care of ourselves," Ms. Root said.