Safety talk

Preventing
Infectious Diseases

Explain dangers

Workers can be exposed to occupational illnesses and infectious diseases because of unsanitary conditions at worksites. Even at a clean worksite where surfaces have been disinfected, workers can be at risk of catching an airborne communicable disease, such as COVID-19.

Infectious diseases can spread in the workplace when:

- An infected person contaminates a surface or an object, which is then touched by another person who transfers it to their mouth, nose, or eyes.
- An infected person coughs or sneezes and the droplets are inhaled into the lungs or land in the mouth, nose, or eyes of people nearby.

The risk of being exposed to an infectious disease at work is related to factors such as:

- How close people are to each other and how much time they spend working closely.
- How often they share objects or touch common surfaces.
- If they are working indoors or outdoors.
- Whether personal protective equipment (PPE) is used, cleaning supplies are available, and sanitary procedures are being followed.

The risk of developing severe symptoms from an infectious disease such as COVID-19 increases with age and weight. It is also higher for people with a compromised immune system or with certain medical conditions, such as respiratory problems.

Identify controls

Good hygiene practices can prevent the transmission of infectious diseases and keep workers healthy and safe at work.

- Stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from other workers. If possible, work in separate rooms or put physical barriers between yourself and other workers.
- If close contact cannot be avoided, wear PPE such as a face mask, safety glasses, and gloves.
- Wash or sanitize your hands often and avoid touching your face, mouth, nose, or eyes.

- Clean and sanitize surfaces or objects regularly. This includes countertops, floors, railings, tools, light switches, and doorknobs.
- Follow the instructions on cleaning product labels and check the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for any hazards and precautions.
- Use cleaning chemicals only in well-ventilated areas and NEVER mix different chemicals.
- Monitor your supply of disinfectant wipes, cleaning products, and PPE to ensure that you don't run out.
- Monitor your co-workers for signs of infection such as a fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath. People are most contagious when they are symptomatic.
- Because diseases can be spread by people who do not have any symptoms, assume everyone could be infected when setting up control measures.

Follow these procedures when cleaning:

1. Put on gloves to protect your hands.
2. Clean surfaces or objects with detergent or soap and water first. This may not kill all the germs but it can reduce their numbers.
3. After cleaning, sanitize surfaces or objects by spraying with a disinfectant. You can make your own by mixing 5 ml of bleach with 750 ml of water.
4. Keep the surface wet with the disinfectant for at least 10 minutes.
5. Rinse the surface with clean water, wipe with a clean towel, and allow it to air dry.
6. Remove gloves, place in a trash bag, and discard. Wash hands after removing gloves.

Demonstrate

Show your crew where wash-up facilities, cleaning products, and PPE supplies are located on site. Review hygiene procedures and how to report cleaning problems or missing supplies.

Review the SDSs of cleaning products used on site and show where they are kept for reference.