

Infectious Disease Prevention

WHY THIS MATTERS

Infectious diseases remain a major workplace hazard. An estimated 135,000 workers die from occupational diseases each year in the U.S. (AFL-CIO). In 2024, employers reported 30,000 respiratory illness cases (OSHA). The WHO estimates that proper hand hygiene alone reduces infection spread by up to 50%. OSHA's General Duty Clause and Bloodborne Pathogens standard (29 CFR 1910.1030) require employers to protect workers from biological hazards.

135K

Estimated annual occupational disease deaths (AFL-CIO)

30K

Respiratory illness cases reported in 2024 (OSHA)

50%

Infection reduction from proper hand hygiene (WHO)

5 Rules for Infectious Disease Prevention

Every worker must follow these rules to reduce infection risk:

- 1 WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY**
Soap and water for 20 seconds — or alcohol-based sanitizer when a sink is not available.
- 2 STAY HOME WHEN SICK**
Fever, cough, vomiting or diarrhea = do not come to work. Notify your supervisor.
- 3 USE PPE AS REQUIRED**
Gloves, masks, face shields and gowns when handling bodily fluids or in high-risk areas.
- 4 COVER COUGHS AND SNEEZES**
Use your elbow or a tissue — not your hands. Dispose of tissues immediately and wash up.
- 5 KEEP SURFACES CLEAN**
Disinfect shared tools, equipment, break areas and high-touch surfaces regularly.

Before You Start — Quick Checklist

- Is hand soap or sanitizer available at your workstation?
- Are you feeling healthy and symptom-free today?
- Do you have required PPE for biological hazards?
- Are shared tools and surfaces being disinfected regularly?
- Do you know the company sick-leave policy?
- Are first-aid kits stocked with gloves and disinfectant?

How Infections Spread at Work

Direct Contact: Touching an infected person or their bodily fluids — blood, saliva, mucus, vomit.

Droplet Spread: Coughing, sneezing or talking sends droplets up to 6 ft — masks reduce this dramatically.

Airborne: Tiny particles stay suspended in air (TB, measles, COVID) — ventilation is critical.

Surface Contact: Viruses survive on surfaces for hours to days — disinfect doorknobs, tools and shared items.

Contaminated Food: Unwashed hands preparing or touching food spread illness fast — especially in break rooms.

Animal/Insect Bites: Outdoor workers risk tick-borne diseases, mosquito-borne illness and animal bites.

Common Mistakes That Spread Illness

- ✗ Coming to work sick — "I'll power through it" infects your entire crew
- ✗ Skipping hand washing because "I didn't touch anything dirty"
- ✗ Sharing water bottles, food or personal items — invisible germs transfer easily
- ✗ Not disinfecting shared tools and equipment between users

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ 20 seconds of hand washing = the most effective infection prevention tool available
- ✓ If you feel sick, stay home — one person's "tough day" can become a site-wide outbreak
- ✓ Disinfect shared surfaces and tools at start of shift, after breaks and at end of day
- ✓ Keep vaccinations current — flu, COVID, tetanus and any required for your work environment

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. Where is the nearest hand washing station or sanitizer on our site?
2. What is our company policy for staying home when sick?
3. Are we disinfecting shared tools and break areas regularly?
4. Do you know which PPE is required for biological hazard exposure?
5. Are your vaccinations up to date for this work environment?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____

Supervisor: _____

Project: _____

Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [] Yes