

Safety Focused

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Knowing the Difference Between Cold and Flu Symptoms

The winter months are often associated with an increase in illnesses, particularly the common cold and seasonal influenza. These conditions can impact any workplace and spread quickly, leaving you and your co-workers with debilitating symptoms.

Though the common cold and seasonal influenza share several symptoms, there are points of differentiation that will help you identify which you may have in order to seek proper treatment. It is essential to distinguish between the two, as the flu can lead to more severe health complications, whereas the cold is generally less serious.

Common Cold Symptoms

Typically, symptoms of the common cold develop gradually, often starting with a sore throat or irritated sinuses. The most common symptoms of a cold are nasal congestion, sneezing and a runny nose. Symptoms can also include a cough, mild headache and minor body aches.

People are generally contagious during the first three days they have a cold. Symptoms typically subside within a week.

Seasonal Flu Symptoms

Unlike the common cold, flu symptoms usually come on suddenly and vigorously, often starting with a high-grade fever, headache, body aches and fatigue. In addition, flu symptoms can include a dry cough, sore throat, and sometimes a runny or stuffy nose.

Symptoms are generally more severe than with a cold. Flu symptoms tend to gradually improve after two to five days, but can last for a week or more. You should stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone to avoid passing your illness to others.

Prevention

Some strategies can help you avoid contracting either of these conditions. These include frequent hand washing, sanitizing commonly touched surfaces, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth. If you are sick, cough and sneeze into your elbow to prevent the spread of germs to others.

Treatment

For the common cold, a doctor visit is usually unnecessary. Over-the-counter medications can be effective in treating symptoms. For the flu, a doctor may prescribe antiviral medications that can help decrease the severity and duration of symptoms.

Potentially serious health complications can occur in people suffering from the flu. Call your doctor if you think your symptoms are worsening or if you have a condition such as asthma, diabetes or are pregnant.

Safety First

Knowing the difference between the common cold and seasonal flu can help you better determine when it's best to stay home from work and seek medical care. In doing so, you can protect yourself and minimize the spread of illness in the workplace, ultimately keeping everyone healthy and safe.

Consult your supervisor for more workplace safety tips.

De-icing Outdoor Walking Surfaces in Winter

Keeping outdoor walking surfaces, such as parking lots and sidewalks, clear of ice in the winter is a crucial practice at many workplaces.

Not only does ice removal offer aesthetic benefits, it can also help keep you, your co-workers and the general public (e.g., customers or passersby) protected from the risk of slips and trips on the job site.

With this in mind, here's how you can play your part in promoting effective and safe de-icing measures at the workplace this winter.

Ice Removal Best Practices

Utilize the following guidance to ensure proper ice removal procedures on the job site:

- **Use the right mixture.** The most effective method for de-icing an outdoor walking surface is to apply a chemical mixture throughout the area, either to melt existing ice or prevent ice from forming altogether. This mixture typically includes rock salt (sodium chloride), magnesium chloride pellets or calcium chloride pellets. That being said, make sure to use the correct mixture for the conditions at hand.
- **Watch the weather.** Keep an eye on the weather forecast to determine when you need to apply the de-icing mixture to outdoor walking surfaces. This mixture should be applied when temperatures are below freezing or if conditions such as snow, hail or sleet are possible.
- **Apply the mixture correctly.** Make sure you apply the de-icing mixture in thin, even layers across outdoor walking surfaces. Try to apply one layer before conditions occur, one or more layers while these conditions are taking place and a final layer after conditions have passed. Keep in mind that if there is snow on a surface, it must be shoveled first before applying the de-icing mixture. Simplify the de-icing process by shoveling snow after every few inches of accumulation rather than all at once.

- **Protect your hands.** Keep your hands properly protected when applying the de-icing mixture by wearing thick gloves or mittens and using a scoop to distribute the mixture evenly.
- **Eliminate excess materials.** When temperatures warm up and the de-icing mixture is no longer necessary, be sure to properly dispose of any remaining mixture left across outdoor walking surfaces. Leaving excess mixture on a surface when it isn't needed could end up creating, rather than removing, slip and trip hazards, as well as potentially damaging the surface itself.

General Winter Weather Precautions

While de-icing outdoor walking surfaces at the workplace, it's vital to protect yourself from winter weather risks. Be sure to implement the following safety precautions during ice removal:

- Always check the weather before working outdoors to properly prepare yourself. Try to limit your time outside if weather conditions are extremely cold, wet or windy.
- Ensure you dress appropriately for the task at hand. Wear several loose layers of clothing, a warm hat that fully covers your head and ears, mittens (rather than gloves) and thick socks to help keep your feet dry. Additionally, wear shoes with ample traction and insulation in order to keep your feet warm and minimize the risk of slipping on icy or snowy surfaces.
- Take a few minutes to stretch before working outdoors to prepare your body and reduce the risk of sprain or strain injuries.
- Be sure to eat healthy foods that are rich in carbohydrates and protein prior to working in the cold to help fuel your body. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water before, during and after your shift.
- Make sure you know the initial signs of health complications such as overexertion, fatigue, frostbite and hypothermia. If you start developing symptoms of these issues, stop working and seek medical assistance.

If you have any questions regarding workplace ice removal measures, talk to your supervisor.



Live Well, Work Well

December 2025

Preventing Burnout During the Holiday Season

Everyday life can be hectic enough without the added pressure of the holidays, which can also be a source of major stress and burnout for many people. Burnout isn't just about being tired; it's emotional, mental and physical depletion caused by prolonged stress. However, with some planning and self-care, you can protect your mental and physical well-being while still enjoying the festivities.

The American Psychological Association reports that the holiday season brings added stress for 2 out of every 5 people.

Consider these tips to help prevent burnout:

- **Set realistic expectations.** Social media and cultural norms often create pressure. Focus on meaningful experiences rather than flawless decorations, trendy outfits or extravagant gifts. Gratitude journaling can help shift your mindset toward what truly matters.
- **Start early.** No matter your holiday plans, spreading out your tasks and starting early will help with stress levels. This way, you won't be waiting until the last minute to complete tasks and rushing through responsibilities.

- **Take time to recharge.** Self-care during the holidays isn't indulgent; it's essential. Regular breaks from daily stressors can prevent burnout by helping your body and mind relax and recharge. Rest restores your energy, boosts your mood and increases productivity.
- **Maintain boundaries.** Boundaries protect your emotions and your physical space. They can be a healthy strategy as you navigate the holiday season and a full calendar. Only commit to the invitations or requests that truly matter to you and let go of the rest.
- **Make a list of all visible and invisible tasks.** Often, the mental load of holiday planning falls on one person and can go unnoticed. For example, "buying a gift" includes making a budget, understanding interests or sizes, deciding on a gift, purchasing it and wrapping it. When invisible labor becomes visible, it's easier to delegate tasks and ask for help.

While these practical strategies can help address some holiday stressors, you should also seek further support from a doctor or mental health professional.

Mindful Holiday Eating

The holiday season often means more parties and gatherings—and an abundance of festive food and drinks. However, practicing mindful holiday eating can help you savor the season without overdoing it. This healthy approach encourages focusing on preparing and consuming food in a distraction-free environment. Mindful eating offers physical and mental health advantages, such as better body cue recognition, overeating prevention, healthier food choices, stress reduction and weight loss.

Consider the following mindful eating tips:

- Honor your hunger and satiety cues.
- Start with small portions.

- Use all five senses when you eat.
- Take small bites and chew slowly.
- Limit distractions while eating.
- Don't skip meals.

Mindful eating doesn't mean avoiding your favorite holiday foods. It's simply about bringing more awareness and enjoyment to your food. You can also try to prioritize the social aspect of gatherings and engage in meaningful conversations to reduce your focus on food.

By practicing mindful holiday eating, you can enjoy the season and create lasting memories. Contact a dietitian if you need guidance on mindful eating.

Learning Your Family Health History

Most people have a family history of at least one chronic disease. Your family health history is one of the most powerful tools for understanding your risk for disease and conditions like heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Knowing this information can help you and your health care provider make informed decisions about screenings, lifestyle changes and preventive care.

A 23andMe survey revealed that although 9 out of 10 Americans agree that knowing family health history is important for knowing their own health risks, fewer than half (38%) actually know it.

- Do you have any chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes or obesity?
- Do you have any health conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol or asthma?
- Have you been diagnosed with any other serious health issues, such as cancer, stroke or Alzheimer's disease?
- How old were you when each of these diseases or health conditions was diagnosed?

Remember to ask about the cause and age of death for relatives who have died. It's important to record your family health history and continually share updates with family members. The U.S. surgeon general's web-based tool, [My Family Health Portrait](#), can help you keep track of information. If you have health concerns, talk with your doctor.

The holiday season is a great time to gather or update family health history information so you can take charge of your health in the new year. Consider asking your family members these questions:

- What is your family's ancestry or ethnic background?