Time Sure Does Fly – It’s Flu Season Again

H1N1. Swine. Avian. Influenza. Whatever you call it, it’s a fact that the flu can take a huge bite out of a company’s workforce and employee productivity. It’s estimated that between 5 and 20 percent of Americans get the flu every year.* The illness costs businesses approximately $10.4 billion in direct costs for hospitalizations and outpatient visits for adults.* As an employer, you’re looking at employees missing anywhere from three to five days of work if they come down with the flu. And, even when employees return to the job, individual productivity can be adversely affected for weeks following an infection.

Flu season traditionally starts in October and can continue into late May, so now is the perfect time for employers to be thinking about proactive steps to keep their workforce healthy and the flu bug away. Consider some of these helpful tips your company can incorporate into its workplace wellness plan:

- Host a flu vaccination clinic in the workplace to offer low- or no-cost flu shots to employees.
- Have an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs and disposable wipes readily available for employees.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as copy machines, telephones, computer keyboards, conference tables, etc., on a regular basis to remove germs.
- Update employees on your sick leave policy and emphasize preventive actions to avoid spreading the virus.
- Cross-train employees in job functions so that you’re not left short-handed should employees be out with the flu for several days.

Every week, experts from BCBSAZ address workplace wellness issues in this dedicated column. If you have questions you would like addressed, please email them to us at wellness@azblue.com.

*Sources: http://www.flumist.com/flu-symptoms-and-you/

Floyd Shewmake, M.D., J.D., is a senior medical director for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona. Dr. Shewmake has more than 30 years’ experience in the healthcare industry. He earned his medical degree from Rush Medical College and a Juris Doctorate from Loyola University School of Law.