

## **ARE YOU READY FOR FLU SEASON?**



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As the leaves begin to fall and our bodies adapt to the colder temperatures, there is a corresponding increase in viruses and flu-like symptoms. Recent reports about the threat of a new superbug, New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase (NDM-1)<sup>1</sup>, spreading from India into Europe and a slight increase of H2N2 in the U.S highlights the importance of proper hygiene as a preventative tool during this change of season.

Experts agree that the best way to stay healthy as we head into flu season is to ***practice proper hygiene and have an efficient cleaning program. It is also important, however, to put a response plan in place in case preventative measures do not work.*** Individual employers must take this important step to help prevent the rapid spread of infection and thus avoid a pandemic. Businesses play a key role in protecting the health and safety of employees, as well as the general public, and in limiting the negative impact on the economy and society. Infectious diseases, such as colds and the flu, are the leading cause of employee absenteeism due to illness. In 2008, full-time working Canadians took an average of 8 sick days, a full day more than just four years earlier<sup>2</sup>, resulting in more than 169 million missed days of work. Lost productivity in the workplace from the flu alone costs employers an estimated \$15 billion.

### **During flu season, protect yourself by following these general tips:**

- Keeping yourself as healthy as possible. Eat well, get lots of rest, and exercise.
- Following effective infection control practices, such as hand washing and/or sanitizing.
- Washing or sanitizing your hands before touching, eating or preparing food, after sneezing, coughing or using the washroom. Wash or sanitize before and after a meeting where you know you will be shaking hands, especially when you or others have a cold.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing – it may prevent those around you from getting sick. If you do not have a tissue, cough into the crook of your elbow.
- Keeping your hands away from your face. The flu enters your body when germs get on your hands and you then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

**As an employer, there are three additional steps you can follow to help prevent the spread of infections such as the flu:**

- 1. Proper Hand-Washing and/or Sanitizing Practices;**
- 2. Institute an Effective and Thorough Green Cleaning Program;**
- 3. Disinfecting Critical Touch Points.**

### **1. Proper Hand-Washing and/or Sanitizing Practices**

Considering the countless things people do and touch with their hands every single day, it becomes clear that ***proper hand washing is the single most important measure for preventing the spread of germs, viruses and infection.*** Physical removal of contaminants by washing with soap and water is a very effective means of infection control. Failure to wash hands thoroughly and spending too short a time washing hands are the major obstacles to infection control. Hand sanitizers are useful alternatives if soap and water are unavailable.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cleanlink.com/news/article/Study-New-Superbugs-Spreading-From-South-Asia--12332>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/health47c-eng.htm>





- Areas most frequently missed during hand washing
- Less frequently missed
- Not missed

(Adapted from Taylor L. (1978) An evaluation of hand washing techniques - I, Nursing Times, 12 January, pp 54-55)

Below are some helpful hand washing tips:

**i. When to wash hands:**

- After sneezing, coughing, and blowing your nose.
- After using the restroom
- Before and after staff meetings
- After scanning newspapers or magazines in the break room
- Before and after eating
- After using someone else’s keyboard or tools
- Before and after a meet and greet activity
- When using shared office equipment such as faxes, phones, photocopiers

**ii. How to wash your hands:**

1. Wet hands with warm running water prior to reaching for soap, either in bar or liquid form.
2. Rub hands together to make a lather. Do this away from running water.
3. Wash the front and back of hands, between fingers and under nails. Continue washing for 15 seconds or more.
4. Rinse hands well under warm running water.
5. Dry hands thoroughly with a clean towel or hand dryer.

These simple actions will go a long way in protecting the health and safety of your employees and customers.

**2. Institute an Effective and Thorough Green Cleaning Program**

The World Health Organization estimates that as many as 1 out of every 3 workers may become sick from his workplace. The impact of this increasingly absent workforce could take a heavy toll on the already weakened economy with billions of dollars at stake due to decreased productivity.

Amid growing health and safety concerns, as well as awareness about long-term damage to the environment, it is important to understand the innumerable advantages that green cleaning provides. An effective green cleaning program which reduces the potential for cross contamination will boost these companies’ productivity in dollars and also reduce potential liabilities. A cleaner work space also leads to higher morale and lower absentee rates, not to mention a healthier working environment for your employees, building occupants, and visitors.

Considering the amount of time that employees and occupants spend in your buildings, it is important to assess Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) and ways in which it can be improved. Recent studies show that the air inside homes and commercial buildings can be 2 to 10 times more polluted than outside air<sup>3</sup>.

By carefully choosing environmentally sound cleaning chemicals, cleaning methods and cleaning equipment, businesses can realize significant productivity gains and increase IAQ. ***An effective green cleaning program should safeguard the health and productivity of employees by providing the highest international and domestic standards for health and safety and reducing any risk of cross contamination from germs and viruses.***

<sup>3</sup> Examining the Relationship between Conventional Cleaning Chemicals and Human Health (and Environmental) Risks – A technical white paper – TerraChoice Environmental Marketing for Avmor Ltd. Copyright 2008.



### **3. Disinfect Critical Touch Points**

Once a thorough green cleaning program is used, then a discriminate use of disinfectants can be considered. It is important to be aware of the effects of the products of chemicals that we use, both in terms of our health and on the environment. In order to optimize the use of disinfectants and reduce their negative effects, it is important to educate your cleaning staff and to carefully plan a cleaning, maintenance and disinfecting program that meets your requirements.

***The use of disinfectants should be limited to “high-touch” areas where germs and infections are easily spread*** such as; phones, desks, computer keyboards, door handle, hand rails, chairs, light switch, elevator buttons, bathrooms, sinks and taps.

Disinfectant products work by oxidizing the germs and breaking down their cell walls or otherwise deactivating them. Different ingredients or combination of ingredients kill different germs. Therefore, it is important to select a disinfectant that works on the specific germs you are trying to get rid of or to select a broad-spectrum product that works on all of the germs that you may encounter.

Surfaces must first be cleaned properly and then disinfected in order to effectively kill bacteria and viruses from critical touch points. Proper disinfection requires dwell time on an already-cleaned surface (the appropriate 'dwell' time can be found on the label of disinfectant products). In order to ensure that you have selected an effective and safe disinfectant, it is recommended that you use only disinfectants that are approved by EPA U.S or DIN Canada. Please refer to Health Canada's Drug and Health Products website for more information: [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodpharma/activit/fs-fi/dinfs\\_fd-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodpharma/activit/fs-fi/dinfs_fd-eng.php).

***Also, the overuse of disinfectants may actually have an adverse effect on our immune system.*** Our bodies need to be exposed to various microbes in order to develop the antibodies that make up a strong immune system. Weakened immune systems and superbugs may be linked to the increase and indiscriminate use of disinfectants and anti-bacterial products. ***Therefore, the focus should be on a healthier cleaning solution, used appropriately, to ensure they are effectively protecting us against disease and infection without having a negative impact on health and indoor air quality.***

### **Educate your Cleaning Staff**

Implementing proper procedures will go a long way towards safekeeping the health and well being of your most important asset: your employees. Communicate to building employees that you have implemented a healthy cleaning plan for their protection. Ask that they also follow procedures to help prevent cross-contamination. For example, you can post visual signage about proper hand washing. Antibacterial hand sanitizer dispensers stationed in key traffic areas in the building provide another reminder for people to clean their hands.

Also important, is to have an **Intervention and Response Plan** in place where you regularly communicate, disseminate information to all employees should a pandemic occur to advise them of the status of the situation.

By not only focusing on the appearance of a clean building, but also on **prevention and the public health aspect** of a good cleaning program, you are doing your part as a responsible corporate citizen.



**About Avmor Ltd.**

Headquartered in Laval, Quebec, Avmor is Canada's leading manufacturer of professional cleaning solutions aimed at the Jan/San and Foodservice markets. Avmor holds a GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) license, which is a prerequisite to be able to manufacture hand soaps that include disinfection claims and a DIN (Drug Identification number) provided by Health Canada. Avmor offers a full range of hand care products. Avmor's complete line of cleaning products include Cleaners/Degreasers, Floor Care, Washroom Care, Food Service Care, Hand Care, BioMaxx, Disinfectants and others. Some of Avmor's signature brands are Av-mixx Dilution Control System, **Biomor Biological Cleaning Solutions**, Quick Stuff Food Service Cleaning System, Synergy Floor Care and **EcoPure**, its new environmentally responsible sanitation program which features over 30 certified Ecologo products. For over 55 years, Avmor has remained at the industry forefront, defining product performance standards and striving for the safest and most cost-effective cleaning systems for professional use. Avmor Ltd. is a privately held company.

