Infection Prevention Control (IPC) Topic: Staying home when sick.

Intro: An important way to reduce the spread of illness is to keep sick people away from those who are not sick.[1] Studies focused on certain healthcare workers occupations or work settings have demonstrated that some HCW often continue to work while ill.[2] Healthcare workers are in close contact with patients and residents who are likely already ill or they are elderly and have other conditions that make them more susceptible to disease. Work restrictions are indicated for healthcare workers with illnesses that are infectious. Presenteeism is defined as a "healthcare worker reporting to work when sick." Some thoughts on why it happens is due to individual work ethic, local culture (e.g., unwillingness to disappoint colleagues), or financial pressures such as a lack of paid sick leave or policies that combine sick leave and vacation days.[8]

What is the risk? Healthcare workers and clients usually have closer interactions during care than people do in community settings. Additionally, patients/residents who are already ill or weak are more likely to be vulnerable to infection. It is not just patients/residents who are at risk—some germs can break through the body's natural defenses, even in a healthy person, like a healthcare worker.[3]

Highlights:

It is the responsibility of the health care organization to implement measures to prevent further transmission of infections, which sometimes warrants exclusion of personnel from work or client contact. Healthcare workers should follow your facilities, employee health and reporting policies regarding signs and symptoms of acute contagious illness. Symptoms may include respiratory issues with or without fever, diarrhea, vomiting, conjunctivitis (pink eye), or any weeping skin lesions. Illnesses such as influenza, COVID-19, and widespread shingles that cannot be covered must also be reported. The policies also need to be designed to encourage personnel to report their illnesses or exposures and not to penalize them with loss of wages, benefits, or job status.[3]

Interventions Healthcare workers can take to stay healthy
- Clean hands often
  - Immediately after removing gloves
  - After touching dirty items
  - Between client contact
  - After touching blood or body fluids
    - Repeated washing of hands throughout the day, whether with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers, can result in dried and cracked skin. Contact dermatitis are caused by irritants that can lead to itching, pain, redness and a local skin infection. Health care workers (HCWs) should be encouraged, after cleaning their hands, to use a moisturizer to

protect the skin.[6] Also, use personal protective equipment such as gloves when handling chemicals.

- Check with your facility policy regarding the appropriate moisturizer to use.
- Contact dermatitis can be a pathway for germs to make healthcare workers sick.

- Speak with your healthcare provider regarding recommended vaccinations for healthcare workers.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle through rest, diet, exercise, and relaxation. Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes. Germs spread this way.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into your elbow. Dispose of tissues in no-touch trash receptacles.
- Keep frequently touched common surfaces clean and disinfected, such as telephones, computer keyboards, doorknobs, etc.
- Do not use other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment.
  - If you need to use a co-worker's phone, desk, or other equipment, clean and disinfect first.
- Develop and review sick leave policies that encourage sick workers to stay at home without fear of any reprisals.[7]
- Excluded from work until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicines such as acetaminophen). Individuals need to see improvement of symptoms. Those with ongoing respiratory symptoms should be considered for evaluation by occupational health to determine appropriateness of contact with patients.

Summary: Healthcare workers are a crucial part of the facility. There are steps you can take now, and during peak illness season's, to help protect the health of your employees.

For more information on staying home when sick and related Project Firstline materials, see References below:

1. https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?q=https://www.cdc.gov/flu/business/stay-home-when-sick.htm&start=0&rows=10&url=https://www.cdc.gov/flu/business/stay-home-when-sick.htm
2. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5670002/pdf/nihms897392.pdf
3. https://www.cdc.gov/project-firstline/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/healthcare/recognize-risks.html
4. https://www.cdc.gov/infection-control/about/index.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/infection-control-HCW.pdf

5. [waysyoucanstayhealthy.pdf (cdc.gov)](waysyoucanstayhealthy.pdf)
6. https://www.aad.org/public/everyday-care/skin-care-basics/dry/coronavirus-handwashing
7. https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?url=https://www.cdc.gov/flu/business/prevent-flu-workplace.html
8. https://www.cdc.gov/infection-control/hcp/healthcare-personnel-infrastructure-routine-practices/exposure-managment.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/healthcare-personnel/exposures.html
9. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/skin-exposure/about/index.html