Supporting Health and Wellness with Dispensers

How Chemical Dispensers Increase Cleanliness during Cold and Flu Season

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The Impact of Cold and Flu Season

Sneezing, coughing and sniffling: The signs that cold and flu season has officially arrived. During the 2018-2019 flu season, more than 42 million cases were reported and lasted for 21 consecutive weeks, making it the longest flu season in ten years.[1] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that flu-related deaths during the same season were in the range of 35,000 to 55,000.[2] Around the globe, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are 1 billion cases of influenza every year.[3]

Even 24 hours before the dreaded symptoms kick in, employees can become contagious to others and remain so for up to 5-7 days.[4] When employees begin to call in sick, it significantly impacts the workplace. In fact, U.S. employees miss nearly 17 million workdays due to the flu, and the illness contributes to $7 billion in lost productivity.[5]

Workplace environments are highly susceptible to harboring and spreading germs to employees. Desks, keyboards, phones and other frequently touched surfaces can easily transmit germs and infect others. Since the flu can last anywhere from 3-7 days, it's vital to take the necessary steps to keep workplaces as clean as possible during illness-prone months.

From high-traffic lobbies to restrooms to open office environments, chemical dispensing systems help clean and disinfect busy areas by measuring the right amount of chemical and water required for cleaning and disinfecting solutions. It's important for facility managers to understand the impact of cold and flu season, the role that chemical dispensers play in upholding cleanliness and best practices for selection, installation and maintenance. With the proper disinfectant and dispensing system, facilities can properly clean key areas and surfaces, eliminating harmful pathogens and creating a healthier environment.

Preparing for the Inevitable

Unfortunately, there's not a simple way to completely avoid cold and flu season. Wherever people go, germs follow. However, there are several ways to reduce the risk of infection, including:

- **Encouraging employees to get their annual flu shot.** Each year, the CDC conducts studies to determine how well the influenza vaccine protects against the flu illness. Most recently, studies have found that vaccination reduces the risk of illness between

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/preliminary-in-season-estimates.htm
[2] https://apnews.com/c9979dd486dd46c8aa65c798af92769f
[3] http://fortune.com/2019/03/11/flu-pandemic-influenza-who/
[4] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/spread.htm
[5] https://www.cleanlink.com/news/article/Flu-Season-Sets-10-Year-Record--23841

40-60%.[6] The effectiveness of the vaccine can depend on the specific strand of flu virus that spreads, who gets vaccinated and when the vaccination takes place. While encouraging employees to get a flu shot can help prevent an outbreak, it shouldn't be the only tactic a facility implements; only 40% of adults on average get their seasonal flu vaccination.[7]

- **Promoting proper hand hygiene.** According to the CDC, 80% of all infections are transmitted by hands.[8] Reminding employees and facility guests to wash their hands after eating, using the restroom and taking out the trash, and providing hand sanitizer throughout the building, can help limit the spread of infection. A recent study showed that close to 97% of people are not properly washing their hands, making it even more important to develop a well-rounded cold and flu prevention strategy.[9]

- **Reminding workers to take a sick day when needed.** It's important for employers to encourage employees to stay home if they show signs of the flu. By coming to work ill, an employee can quickly infect others. However, over half (55%) of Americans would rather power through their symptoms and still go to work when they have a cold or the flu.[8] Additionally, many workers do not have paid sick leave, making it difficult to fully control the spread of infection in a facility.

- **Using the proper cleaning tools.** Updating the janitorial closet before and after cold and flu season is a great way to ensure your facility has the right equipment on hand, especially if there's an outbreak that will require extra stock. Use disinfectant chemicals that kill cold and flu germs, as well as more harmful pathogens that cause illnesses like rhinovirus. From microfiber cloths and mops to chemical dispensing systems, the right cleaning tools support employees as they work to kill cold and flu germs.

Preparing for cold and flu season requires facilities to take certain steps, such as stocking additional cleaning supplies and utilizing the right equipment. These precautions don't stop the cold and flu virus from entering your building, but it will help limit the spread of infection and keep employees and guests healthier.

Disinfecting Considerations

During the cold and flu season, it's important to pay special attention to high-touch surfaces when disinfecting, such as restroom counters and sink handles, floors, light switches, door

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[6] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccines-work/vaccineeffect.htm
[7] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluvaxview/coverage-1516estimates.htm
[8] http://www.newsmax.com/Health/Health-News/infections-hand-fist-bump/2014/01/09/id/546258/
[9] https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucelee/2018/06/30/study-shows-how-bad-people-are-at-washing-their-hands/#1b62fc452481

handles, desks, office telephones and more. Flu viruses can survive on hard surfaces like stainless steel and plastic for up to 24 hours, and cold viruses can live for several hours as well.[10]

Some common cleaning chemicals and methods don't actually kill cold and flu germs. In fact, using antibacterial wipes can sometimes lead to dramatic growth of microbes.[11] It's important to understand the differences between cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing:

- **Cleaning** removes dirt, germs and other impurities by using soap or detergent with water to physically remove germs from surfaces. Cleaning doesn't always kill germs, but removing them helps reduce the spread of infection.

- **Disinfecting** uses chemicals to kill germs. This process does not always clean a dirty surface or remove germs, but it does kill germs, which lowers the risk of infection.

- **Sanitizing** a surface lowers the number of germs to a safe level according to public health standards or requirements. To sanitize a surface or object, it must be properly cleaned or disinfected.

To create a healthier workplace, it's important to clean and disinfect regularly. Surfaces that are visibly soiled, such as food contact surfaces in a kitchen or accidents on floors, should be cleaned and disinfected immediately. Cold and flu viruses can spread quickly through cross contamination. At minimum, clean and disinfect surfaces to kill germs on a daily basis and more often if surfaces are regularly touched or a known outbreak occurs.

Use products that are proven effective against cold and flu viruses, such as an EPA-registered disinfectant to kill germs. Follow label directions on cleaning products and disinfectants. Most disinfectants require time to work properly, so allow the chemical to dwell on the surface for as long as directed.

The Role of Chemical Dispensers

Manually measuring cleaning chemical can put employees in harm's way. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that 2.8 million people in the cleaning industry are exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals every day.[12] Improper handling of chemicals can lead to spills which could cause injuries like burns and respiratory problems from fume inhalation. Depending on the type of chemical, exposure could even lead to death.

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[10] https://www.health.com/cold-flu-sinus/flu-virus-live-on-surfaces
[11] https://www.medicaldaily.com/antibacterial-wipes-not-effective-killing-germs-scientist-says-422674
[12] https://www.cleanlink.com/news/article/Two-Cleaning-Employees-Hospitalized-After-Improper-Chemical-Use--24164#

Keeping staff healthy throughout the cold and flu season means keeping safety top of mind. To prevent workers from being exposed to cleaning chemical, and to ensure the workplace remains clean and free of harmful germs, facilities can install a chemical dispenser.

Chemical dispensers enhance cleaning effectiveness and productivity by:

- **Providing accuracy and safety**. Dispensers eliminate measuring guesswork for employees. Closed-loop systems prevent spills and exposure to chemical by eliminating the traditional and unsafe "glug-glug" method of measuring chemical by hand. With each use, systems accurately dispense the proper amount of chemical and water required. By making cleaning and disinfecting easier, these systems can encourage workers to clean more frequently and properly.

- **Promoting a healthy working environment.** Chemical dispensers help reduce the spread of germs by accurately dispensing disinfecting chemical according to manufacturer recommendations. Dispensing systems can be used to fill spray bottles for surface cleaning and mop buckets or autoscrubber tanks for floor cleaning. Chemical can also be dispensed into sink compartments for warewashing needs. Using a chemical dispenser to perform these tasks helps a facility reduce the spread of germs and uphold its positive reputation.

- **Enhancing sustainability and cost savings.** When dispensers dose the right amount of chemical, this helps reduce chemical and water use while limiting packaging waste, supporting environmental stewardship and increasing the bottom line. Additionally, it ensures cleaning is done right the first time, improving productivity and reducing labor costs.

Dispensing System Best Practices

When considering investing in a dispensing system, it's important to review the system's features as well as tips for installation, training and maintenance. To guide your business when looking for a dispensing system, consider the following best practices:

1. **Determine who will use the system and how often.** A user friendly interface will simplify training and encourage employees to conduct frequent cleaning. During cold and flu season, it's especially important for employees to clean and disinfect on a daily basis, so the dispensing system needs to function without interruption.

2. **Make a list of the types of products you use most.** If your business uses numerous types of chemical, you'll need a dispenser capable of managing multiple products without chemical carryover issues. Find a dispenser that utilizes technology to channel incoming water to the proper eductor, resulting in the right amount of chemical in the water stream. Additionally, if you use multi-purpose products for cleaning and

disinfecting, your dispenser will need to provide multiple dilutions to provide accurate measurements.

3. **Prioritize water flow and pressure**. All buildings have different water pressure and flow, and it can vary throughout the day, impacting the dilution of a cleaning or disinfecting solution. Find a dispensing system that is designed to eliminate dilution variance and includes venturi-based units that regulate water flow automatically.

4. **Search for a smart system**. Today, some dispensing systems feature technology that offers predictive maintenance, remote monitoring and automated adjustments. Dispensing systems that can record and capture data on key performance indicators can help an organization understand how much product, water and energy is being used and track how often the system is being used to meet cleanliness goals.

5. **Select the right area to install the system**. Dispensing systems should be installed in an area that is easy to access and where water is readily available. Search for a compact dispensing system that does not take up valuable wall space.

Most importantly, a dispensing system should be well-suited for current and future needs within the business. Over time, keep up with maintenance by checking on the filter, metering tips and tubing. Replace parts as needed and encourage employees to report any possible issues, such as no chemical draw.

Creating a Healthy Workplace

While the official start and end of cold and flu season can vary, it can sometimes stretch from October to as late as May, according to the CDC.[12] To keep employees,building occupants and visitors healthy, every facility must prioritize regular cleaning and disinfection. Having the right tools in place that support health and wellness, like dispensing systems, helps facilities better maintain cleanliness and improve productivity during these months of elevated illness.