

This OSH Answers document will discuss other methods beyond hand washing that can also help to slow or stop the spread of infections.

What are good practices to slow the spread of infections?

Ways you can reduce or slow the spread of infections include:

- Get the appropriate vaccine.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Stay home if you are sick (so you do not spread the illness to other people).
- Use a tissue, or cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand. Turn away from other people.
- Use single-use tissues. Dispose of the tissue immediately.
- Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or using tissues.
- If working with children, have them play with hard surface toys that can be easily cleaned.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth (viruses can transfer from your hands and into the body).
- Do not share cups, glasses, dishes or cutlery.

What can a workplace do?

Workplaces can help by:

- Having an infection control plan.
- Providing clean hand washing facilities.
- Offering waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizers when regular facilities are not available (or to people on the road).
- Providing boxes of tissues and encourage their use.
- Reminding staff to not share cups, glasses, dishes and cutlery. Be sure dishes are washed in soap and water after use.
- Removing magazines and papers from waiting areas or common rooms (such as tea rooms and kitchens).
- Considering cleaning a person's workstation or other areas where they have been if a person has suspected or identified influenza.
- Making sure ventilation systems are working properly.

In the event of a pandemic flu, the Public Health Agency of Canada states that wearing masks when face-to-face with coughing individuals will not be practical or helpful if the infection or virus has entered the community. Special handling of linen or waste contaminated with secretions from persons thought to be or who are sick is not required.

If cleaning is necessary, how should it be done?

Additional measures may be required to minimize the virus from transmitting by hard surfaces (sinks, door and cupboard handles, railings, objects, counters, etc.). The length of time a virus survives on hard surfaces depends on the type of virus. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) in the United States indicates that "Most studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only 2 to 8 hours after being deposited on a surface." Other estimates range up to 24 and 48 hours.

In most workplaces and homes, cleaning floors, walls, doorknobs, etc. with regular disinfectants or soap and water is very adequate. In some workplaces, such as a hospital or health care facility, specific cleaning and disinfection steps are often required.

What is meant by social distancing?

Social distancing is a strategy where you try to avoid crowded places, large gatherings of people or close contact with a group of people. In these situations, viruses can easily spread from person to person. In general, a distance of one metre (3 feet) will slow the spread of a disease, but more distance is more effective.

Should social distancing be recommended, steps to follow include:

- Use telephone, video conferencing, or the internet to conduct as much business as possible (including within the same building).
- Allow employees to work from home, or to work flexible hours to avoid crowding the workplace.
- Cancel or postpone any travel, meetings, workshops, etc. that are not absolutely necessary.
- Drive, walk, or cycle to work, but try to avoid public transit. Alternatively, workplaces can consider allowing staff to arrive early/late so they can use public transit when it is less crowded.
- Allow staff to eat at their desks or have staggered lunch hours to avoid crowded lunch rooms.
- Spend as little time as possible in tearooms or photocopy centres.
- When meetings are necessary, have the meeting in a larger room where people can sit with more space between them (at least about one metre apart). Avoid shaking hands or hugging.
- Encourage staff to avoid social gatherings outside of work where they might come into contact with infectious people.

What should a workplace do if an employee becomes ill at work?

Reasons to determine "fitness to work" may depend on a number of issues such as size or type of organization, job responsibilities of employees, ease of working from home (via internet connections, etc.).

Generally, employees should be allowed and encouraged to stay at home if they are not feeling well. However, in the event of a pandemic, use screening tools or a list of symptoms as a checklist. If employees are showing any signs, allow them to go or remain at home. If there is doubt if a person is sick, they should stay home until they feel well and are able to resume their regular activities.

NOTE: During a pandemic, information is likely to change rapidly. Please see the last question in the OSH Answers [Pandemic Influenza](#) for a list of agencies that can help.