

WHY CLEANING AND HAND HYGIENE IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Public health and operational benefits of infection prevention

Public health and operational success go hand in hand. As the winter virus season approaches and employers grapple with continued staffing shortages, it is increasingly important to keep good cleaning and hand hygiene practices top of mind.

How businesses approach cleaning and hand hygiene can have a big impact on employee health, productivity and their top and bottom lines.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that sick days cost U.S. businesses roughly \$225.8 billion annually, and a study conducted by the ISSA Cleaning Association showed unplanned absences alone reduce productivity by as much as 54 percent.^{1,2} These numbers are eye opening in any year, but today's labor stresses — spanning industries from hospitality to food service to schools — place added emphasis on the need to prioritize health and wellness.

Employers that adopt and stick to effective cleaning and hand hygiene practices will be well positioned to maintain a healthy, productive workforce at a time when every available worker is greatly needed. The risk of some of the challenges we've seen in recent years — restaurants limiting hours of operation, schools struggling to find substitute teachers, and businesses of all sizes feeling the impact of lost productivity due to sick employees — can be mitigated with the right approach, commitment and partnership.



Health, satisfaction and productivity

In a given year, it's estimated that U.S. employees miss 111 million workdays because of the flu alone, resulting in an estimated \$16.3 billion in lost earnings each year.³ Broken down to the individual employee level, research solution firm Circadian found that unscheduled absences in general cost roughly \$3,600 per year for each hourly worker and \$2,660 a year for each salaried worker.⁴ Those costs are attributed to many factors, including wages paid to absent staff, overtime pay, reduced productivity and morale and poorer quality goods and services. In a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 59% of participants said unplanned absences disrupt the work of others, 40% said they reduce the quality of work and 20% said they require additional training.⁵

While keeping staff safe and productive should always be a high priority, employers should also want employees to be satisfied, engaged and comfortable at work. They should want them to *want* to be at work and have confidence that their wellbeing is fundamental to the practices their business or building has in place.

Employee expectations have changed. There may be additional scrutiny on cleaning procedures, the availability of cleaning and hygiene solutions at their disposal, the types of products being used and even sick time protocols. These factors should be considered from a broad perspective, from cleaning staff to office employees to those visiting an establishment.

COST OF UNPLANNED ABSENCES

\$3,600 PER YEAR
for each hourly worker⁴

\$2,660 PER YEAR
for each salaried worker⁴

Reduced productivity
as much as
54%²

1 <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/model/evaluation/productivity.html>

2 https://harderCorp.com/downloads/issa_value_of_clean_white_paper.pdf

3 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17544181/>

4 <https://www.circadian.com/white-paper-absenteeism>

5 https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/documents/kronos_us_executive_summary_final.pdf

Personally, I want to know that when I work in or visit a building, that is being properly maintained and that those in it are following guidelines that promote health and safety. People may judge the cleanliness and safety of a building by the way it looks and smells and if there are clues of a commitment to health, such as hand sanitizer, signage about cleaning protocols, and soap in the soap dispensers.

A cleaning and hand hygiene program that incorporates the right products and protocols can earn buy-in, drive productivity and satisfy employee expectations. It can also help deliver exceptional experiences that drive revenue through longer stays, positive reviews, referrals and increased visits and business.

These experiences over time can help drive trust and loyalty and create peace of mind for customers, guests, students, residents, families, or other building occupants.

Prevention is the best line of defense

Preventing the spread of illness—before it impacts your business or operations—is the best line of defense. Yet achieving this is multifaceted, and there is not a “silver bullet” or a simple box to check. But that doesn’t mean it needs to be complicated, either.

4 ELEMENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE HYGIENE PROGRAM

1

HAND HYGIENE

Practicing hand hygiene is a simple yet effective way to prevent infections.⁶ In fact, according to the CDC, regular handwashing is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick, and prevent the spread of germs to others.⁷ Yet despite its simplicity, many people do not wash their hands the right way or at the right times. Being committed to hand hygiene can strengthen this first line of defense. Signage and other visual cues can remind people to practice proper hand hygiene. Make sure soap dispensers are checked and filled regularly and that hand sanitizer is available in high traffic areas (i.e., near food prep areas, elevators and drinking fountains) and spaces where people gather.

2

SURFACE HYGIENE

Surfaces that people touch might also contain viruses that can get people sick so it’s important to treat these surfaces with science-backed products, registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and proven to kill specific pathogens. It’s important to make sure the right products are being used in the right way and in the right places, disinfecting high touch points such as doorknobs, bathroom fixtures and light switches, for example.

3

PROCEDURES AND TRAINING

How, when and where cleaning occurs is just as important as if it occurs. For effective results, staff should receive comprehensive onboarding along with ongoing training and support and have procedure guidance and tools available on demand. In my experience, the easier it is for employees to follow procedures, the greater the compliance and therefore likelihood of achieving the desired results. It is also important to advocate for all building occupants to do the right thing, through intentional placement of sanitizer stations, signage and other visual cues.

4

VERIFICATION

Program maintenance is critical to delivering effective results day after day. You’ll want to set measurable goals and put checks and balances in place to make sure that the products you chose and training you provided are being put into practice consistently and identify training opportunities. This can also help build a culture of hygiene and continuous improvement for your employees to help advance hygiene practices.

6 <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/index.html>
7 <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html>
8 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24670070/>

A cleaning and hand hygiene program that covers these areas can go a long way to help prevent the spread of illness. In fact, an evaluation of these practices found that implementing a robust hand sanitizer, disinfectant and facial tissue program in an office setting reduced viral infection by 77 percent.⁸ This can help keep employees at work, productive, and reduce operational cost of unplanned staff absences.

Though a comprehensive cleaning program might seem like a tangible item that's easy to cut during challenging times, its positive impact on labor is multiplicative, with benefits far outweighing the cost. In addition to other bottom-line benefits such as reducing replacement costs and cleaning time, investing in cleaning and hand hygiene can help drive short- and long-term revenue.

Finding the right partner

Those in charge of running business operations or managing a labor force face a multitude of demands every day. Becoming an expert in cleaning and hand hygiene protocols should not be one of them. They should be able to leverage the expertise of a partner to help them establish and maintain an effective hygiene program that supports the health of employees and others in their place of business. A good partner will provide the solutions, expertise, training and support to help meet hygiene expectations. They will provide a complete program that is flexible and addresses the specific needs of a location. A great partner will make it easy to deliver an effective, comprehensive, sustainable program that helps provides peace of mind and results in improved confidence, productivity, satisfaction and engagement—and creates an environment that people *want* to spend time in.

A robust hand sanitizer, disinfectant and facial tissue program in an office setting reduced viral infection by **77%**

Learn how you can help protect people and your business through an effective hygiene program

[ECOLAB.COM/SEASONAL-VIRUS-PREVENTION](https://ecolab.com/seasonal-virus-prevention)



About the author



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As a staff science and technical expert, Amanda develops surface hygiene solutions for a wide range of markets and is an expert on disinfection products and applications, particularly related to COVID-19. Amanda is a member of Ecolab's Food Safety and Public Health Leadership Team and provide guidance and advisory support across Ecolab and to customers. She has a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and has held various roles at Ecolab supporting quality manufacturing, product development and product commercialization.



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