Beginning in late November each year, the flu affects millions of us. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says this germy bug costs businesses nearly $10 billion in employee medical visits every year. The Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) is urging businesses to help keep their employees healthy by maintaining a clean and productive work environment.

“Better business can start with something as simple as good hygiene,” said Dana Badgerow, president and CEO of the BBB of Minnesota and North Dakota. “It’s hard for any company to meet their bottom line when their employees are dropping like flies.”

The CDC has made it easier for employers to promote a healthy work environment with a free employer tool kit
, “Make It Your Business to Fight the Flu.”

To help protect employees and customers as much as possible, the BBB and CDC advise businesses to:

Acquire products that ward off germs. Hand sanitizers, tissues and disinfectants are all products that can aid employees in keeping the workspace clean. Make them readily available throughout your workspaces. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Advise employees to stay home. While sick employees may deem it necessary to attend work, their presence will only expose healthy employees to contagions. If employees are sick, they should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer show symptoms. Consider creating a leave policy that allows employees to work from home should they (or their children) fall ill.

Enforce good hygiene in the work place. Institute the cleaning of shared equipment such as phones and computers, and wipe down common areas with disinfectant regularly. Remind employees of the importance of washing their hands, as well as covering their mouth when sneezing and/or coughing. Encourage them to “sneeze in your sleeve,” rather than into their hand, to reduce the spread of germs.

Promote flu shots. Search for on-site flu shots through your local hospital, retail pharmacy or other health care provider, or consider reimbursing some or all of the cost for employees to receive the shot on their own.

Hold a health fair. Contact your local hospital to see if they provide health fairs for employers. If your business isn’t large enough, you can possibly team up with others in your building, office park or neighborhood. If you are in a retail location, you can invite the community, as well. You can also contract the coordination of an on-site health fair with a company specializing in the service.

Be the example. It is important for the employer to follow the same advice being given to the employees. As the boss, it may seem impossible to take a sick day, but it is just as important for you to stay home and keep your germs out of the office.

Visit the BBB's website for more Business Tips or join our LinkedIn business group.

The mission of the Better Business Bureau is to be the leader in building marketplace trust by promoting, through self-regulation, the highest standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, assist and protect the general public. Our hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact the BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222. Visit our Centennial website at bbbis100.org

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