



3 Ways to Reduce Sickness in Open Office Environments

As open office plans increase in popularity, it's become evident that they present a unique set of challenges. Studies have shown that employees are twice as likely to get sick in open working spaces.

Absenteeism causes employers to lose \$225.8 billion a year due to lost productivity. These costs undermine the cost-effectiveness of open office layouts. To avoid these pitfalls, companies need to adjust their cleaning programs to be more effective in reducing the spread of germs.



1 Help Occupants Maintain Hand Hygiene

It's well-known that handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infection. Hand hygiene is a critical component of any cleaning program, and the need for accessible, effective hygiene products is magnified in open offices where there's more interaction amongst employees.

In addition to keeping soap stocked in restrooms, handwashing education makes a difference. Posters remind employees of the importance of proper hand hygiene and educate them on the most effective ways to clean their hands. According to the Bradley Healthy Handwashing Survey, nearly 40% of Americans say they're more likely to wash their hands after seeing a sign that requires employees to wash before returning to work.

Outside the restroom, hand sanitizer should be located in high-traffic common areas, like lobbies, break rooms, and conference rooms. In a recent study, hand sanitizing stations, bottles, and wipes were distributed in highly populated offices. The study found that there was a 13 percent decrease in unscheduled time off.

2 Prepare for Increased Workspace Density

Along with the open office trend, the number of workspaces per square foot has increased. From 1970 to 2015, the average square footage per employee shrunk from 400 to 180 square feet. Housekeeping programs that

are planned around square footage may not accurately capture how much cleaning is required.

Instead, it's important to focus on the number of workspaces that need to be cleaned. This may be more costly than the traditional price-per-square-foot model, but that can be addressed by driving increases in efficiency. By implementing equipment and processes that save time, cleaners can work more quickly without sacrificing occupant health.

3 Take Care of Touch Points

Many cleaning programs include touch point cleaning, but too often, it's an afterthought. Touch points can hold on to germs for longer periods of time than hands. According to the CDC, the flu virus can live on hard surfaces for up to 24 hours.

To get rid of germs, it takes more than simply wiping them down. Cleaning with a combination of microfiber cloths and disinfectants is the most effective way to kill and physically remove bacteria and viruses.

Another common mistake in touch point cleaning is failing to identify the range of touch points in a facility. When people think of touch points, they most commonly think of door handles, elevator buttons, and countertops. But offices contain many more touch points – like the backs of chairs, white boards, printers, and coffee machines. Including these in the cleaning scope of work ensures they won't be neglected.

Conclusion

Open office floor plans magnify the importance of an attentive, expert facility maintenance program. By making considerations for the spread of germs, you can enjoy the savings and improved worker collaboration that the open office environment provides. These simple techniques enhance the occupant experience and reduce the high costs of employee illness.



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