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Watch Out for Your Coworkers This Cold-and-Flu Season

Survey finds some feel they are indispensable and can't miss work when they're sick

ROSWELL, Ga., Sept. 24, 2013 — Cold-and-flu season is notoriously unpredictable, but there's one thing you can count on: People will get sick. And when they do, many will bring their germs to work, putting others at risk.

Why? They feel they're "essential" or have too much on their plates. A survey released today by [Kimberly-Clark Professional](#) found that 59 percent of people go to work when they're sick. Three in 10 said it was because they were too important to the business operation, which prompts the question: Are their germs essential too?

A cough, a sneeze, an unwashed hand touching an elevator button, stair railing, ATM machine or other "hot spot" in an office or other location – that's all it takes to spread cold and flu germs. Viruses on surfaces like sink faucets and door handles can spread rapidly, especially in public places, and studies have shown that workers are exposed to illness-causing bacteria right in their own break rooms, as well as elsewhere around the office.

While you may not be able to change the behavior of others, there are things you can do to protect yourself. Chief among them is to wash, wipe and sanitize. That message appears to be getting through. According to the survey:

- 79 percent wash their hands after coming in contact with a sick colleague.
- 97 percent wash their hands after using the restroom as a way to avoid getting sick.
- 81 percent use a hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes.
- And 84 percent said the top motivator for using products to avoid colds and the flu was easy access.

"More than one third of people say they are germ anxious and want to take steps to protect themselves against other people's germs," said Elane Stock, president, Kimberly-Clark Professional. "That's why it's crucial for people to adopt the Hygienfy! wash, wipe, sanitize

protocol – three easy steps that reduce the chance of infection from colds and flu in the workplace by about 80 percent.”¹

That’s a significant benefit when you consider that 63 percent of respondents said they or a family member had been sick in the six months prior to the survey.

“Germs can be spread throughout the workplace and elsewhere when people touch hot spots that have been contaminated by people who are ill,” said Dr. Charles Gerba, Professor of Microbiology at the University of Arizona. “That’s why individual efforts can make such a big difference. If you stay home when you’re sick, you won’t be passing your germs around the break room and other places.”

Last year’s flu season was particularly nasty – an epidemic, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It’s yet another reason you need to prepare to take care of yourself before it’s too late. Here are some actions you can take:

- *Speak Up* – Ask your human resources or building manager to provide the convenient and accessible tools you need to help break the chain of germ transmission – such as hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, plenty of paper towels (since drying with a paper towel can reduce the spread of germs on hands up to 77 percent), soap and facial tissue.
- *Take steps to prevent the spread of germs* – Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze and then throw the tissue away. Try to use an anti-viral tissue, since they have a special moisture-activated middle layer that traps and kills cold and flu viruses. If you don’t have a tissue handy, cough or sneeze into the inner part of your sleeve at the elbow.
- *If you get sick, stay home* – Don’t put other people at risk because you feel you’re too “essential” to stay away from the office. If you do become sick with a flu-like illness, the CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone.
- You may also want to check out your germ personality. A [new quiz](#) from Kimberly-Clark Professional can tell you where you stand on the germaphobe spectrum. The results may surprise you.

To arrange an interview with Dr. Gerba or Kelly Arehart, Ph.D., senior manager, Global Innovation, Health and Wellness, Kimberly-Clark Professional, **contact** kcphwp@schwartzmsl.com or call Rachel Gross at 781-684-0770. For more information about the survey see these infographics.

¹ The reduction in probability of infection is based upon mathematical modeling referenced in the Workplace Wellness Intervention Study.

To learn more about how to protect against cold and flu or to take the germ personality quiz, visit The Cold and Flu HQ at www.kcprofessional.com/ColdandFluHQ.

Survey Methodology

Conducted by ORC International on behalf of Kimberly-Clark Professional, the telephone survey used two national probability samples, which, when combined, consisted of 1,005 adults, 18 years of age and older, living in the continental United States. (655 interviews were from the landline sample and 350 interviews from the cell phone sample; 423 of these adults were employed full or part time.) The interviews were conducted from February 28 – March 3, 2013. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 3.1%, and 4.8% for those employed full or part time, at the 95% confidence level.

A Multifaceted Approach to Germ Fighting

Through programs such as [The Healthy Workplace Project](#), [The Healthy Schools Project](#), [LiveWell](#) and others, Kimberly-Clark Professional offers a unique approach to hand and surface hygiene that helps people understand how germs are transmitted to help stop their spread. The programs provide educational materials in conjunction with hand and surface hygiene products, arming people with the tools and knowledge necessary to break the chain of germ transmission in offices, schools, manufacturing facilities, hotels, stadiums and other locations. By reinforcing the importance of the Hygienify! protocol of “wash, wipe, sanitize,” people can significantly reduce the risk of infection from cold, flu and other germs. For more information, visit [The Cold and Flu HQ](#) at www.kcprofessional.com/ColdandFluHQ.

About Kimberly-Clark Professional

Kimberly-Clark Professional partners with businesses to create Exceptional Workplaces, helping to make them healthier, safer and more productive. Key brands in this segment include: Kleenex, Scott, WypAll, Kimtech and Jackson Safety. Kimberly-Clark Professional, located in Roswell, Ga., is one of Kimberly-Clark Corporation’s four business sectors. To see how we are helping people the world over work better, please visit www.kcprofessional.com.

About Kimberly-Clark

Kimberly-Clark Corp. (NYSE: KMB) and its well-known global brands are an indispensable part of life for people in more than 175 countries. Every day, nearly a quarter of the world’s population trust K-C’s brands and the solutions they provide to enhance their health, hygiene and well-being. With brands such as Kleenex, Scott, Huggies, Pull-Ups, Kotex and Depend, Kimberly-Clark holds the No. 1 or No. 2 share position in more than 80 countries. To keep up with the latest K-C news and to learn more about the Company’s 141-year history of innovation, visit www.kimberly-clark.com or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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