Illnesses, Remedies and Impairment

Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

A befuddled state of mind is not conducive to performing tasks whether personal or work-related. It is a breeding ground for accidents. This groggy and foggy state may be the result of a cold, flu or other illness and often mixed with over-the-counter or prescription meds. You can be impaired by both over-the-counter and prescription meds. Alcohol, marijuana or other drugs aren't the only drugs that cause impairment.

What's the Danger?

We have all suffered from the "common cold" or had the "flu bug" and taken medication for both. Many of these drugs affect your ability to drive and operate equipment; just read the warning labels:

May cause dizziness, drowsiness, or impair your ability to operate vehicles, vessels, or machines.

These medications, along with being sick can slow your reaction time, diminish your ability to make snap decisions (sometimes life or death decisions), cause you to fall asleep at the wheel of whatever you're operating or driving, make you more likely to fall because of dizziness, and make careless mistakes.

How to Protect Yourself

The first step to protect yourself is to do what you can to stay healthy. Here are some ways you can avoid colds and other illnesses that might be going around your workplace.

1. As unsociable as it may sound, try to avoid people with colds. Colds are spread from one person to the other – through droplets in the air and on their hands.
2. Wash your hands frequently, especially when you have had contact with someone with a cold.
3. If you have a cold, cover your sneezes and coughs by sneezing or coughing into a tissue or into the crook of your elbow.

    - The idea is to keep your hands as clean as possible, so you aren’t spreading germs.
    - Dispose of tissues right after use and away from others. Nobody wants to look at a pile of used and germ laden tissues.
    - Wash your hands as soon as possible if you sneezed or coughed into them.
    - Handwashing is mentioned twice because it is one of the best ways you can avoid spreading your germs and catching someone else’s.
4. Sorry to say, but Mom and Dad were wrong – you don’t catch a cold from going outdoors without your coat. However, it does appear that your resistance to colds may have something to do with general good health. So, follow some of their advice and:
    - Get enough rest and sleep.
    - Exercise regularly.
    - Eat a nutritious, well-balanced diet.

The second step to protecting yourself and others is to not show up to work if:

- You are sick; or
- You’re taking medication that can impair your ability to:
    - Drive to and from work safely.
    - Perform your work safely – including operating machines, driving a forklift, going out on a sales call, loading and unloading materials, operating a crane, driving a truck, and other activities.

Final Word

Give yourself a break and keep yourself and others safe. Stay home if you’re sick and never try to drive or operate machines or equipment if you’re under the influence of medication that impairs your ability to make decisions or makes you sleepy. It’s not worth it.