

Cold season: proper handwashing technique

Handwashing is one of the first lines of defense to avoid illness, and it also prevents spreading germs to others. At a minimum, you should wash your hands before, during, and after preparing food; before eating food; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and after going to the bathroom.

During cold and flu season, you should be especially vigilant with your handwashing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends following these steps every time you wash your hands:

- Wet your hands with running water. Turn off the tap, and apply soap.
- Rub your soapy hands together for at least 20 seconds (this may feel long to you—but this step is important). Be thorough; don't forget to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water.
- Dry your hands—use a clean towel or air dryer.

It may surprise you that the temperature of the water you use does not matter. Using cold water is fine—effective handwashing is all about the length of time and how thorough you scrub. For details on the science of the recommendations, click [here](#).



EMPLOYEE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

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Winter holiday fire safety

Millions of people across the United States will celebrate this winter season with family and friends. However, according to the National Fire Protection Association, December is the peak time for home fires caused by candles. With the fire hazard high, follow these seasonal tips to prevent your good time from going up in smoke.

General safety

- You should have a smoke alarm installed on every level/floor of your home. Test the equipment monthly and replace the batteries according to the manufacturer's instructions. Smoke alarm devices older than 10 years should be completely replaced.
- Know your exit routes and have an escape plan. Make sure every member of your family, including children, know what to do in case of an emergency.

Lights and decorations

- Inspect decorative lights before you put them up—throw away pieces that have frayed, pinched, or exposed wires or broken bulbs.
- Some lights are rated for indoor or outdoor use only. Read and follow all of the manufacturer's warnings.
- Use clips to hang string lights, not nails, in order to avoid damaging the wiring.
- Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame-retardant.
- Don't overload electrical sockets.
- Turn off lights and electronic decorations before going to bed or leaving home.

Candles

- If possible, use battery-operated candles instead of those with flames.
- Store matches and lighters away from the reach of children.
- Keep lit candles away from the reach of children.
- Place candles away from flammable materials, including near windows with blinds or curtains.
- Never leave a burning candle unattended—make sure they are fully extinguished before leaving the room or going to bed.

Trees

- If decorating with a fresh tree, select one with green needles that don't fall off when you touch them. Cut 2 inches from the base on the trunk before placing it in a tree stand.
- Make sure the tree is located at least 3 feet from any heat source and that it is not blocking an exit.
- Never decorate a tree with lit candles.
- Dry trees pose an elevated fire hazard. Water the tree stand each day.
- Dispose of the tree when it is dry or immediately after you are finished using it. Don't store a dry tree in your home, garage, or on your property for any length of time. Check with your community to see if it is having a recycling program.

A guide to first-aid kits

Do you know where the first-aid kit is located in your facility? The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements for first-aid kits only apply to certain industries. However, in general industry, including office spaces, adequate first-aid supplies should be readily available to you.

First-aid supplies should be kept in one place and include everything necessary to treat minor cuts, scrapes, and burns—gauze, bandages, first-aid tape, and antibiotic ointment. A kit may also contain a CPR one-way valve face shield, aspirin, hydrocortisone, instant cold compresses, scissors, and tweezers.

Once a kit is made or purchased, it can't be forgotten about—it needs to be maintained so that it will actually be useful during an unexpected emergency. Employers or the staff responsible for the kit should inspect it at least once a year. The kit should be kept organized, expired items should be thrown away, and any items that are running low should be restocked.

Silica dust: Are you at risk?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued the report, [Engineered Stone Fabrication Workers at Risk for Lung Disease Caused by Silica Dust Exposure](#). In response, lawmakers have called on OSHA to issue a new national emphasis program that focuses on engineered stone fabrication to protect workers. However, workers fabricating engineered stone aren't the only ones at risk—about 2.3 million U.S. workers are exposed to silica dust on the job in industries that include construction, mining, and fracking.

Health hazards

Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust. Over time, silica dust can scar lung tissue resulting in symptoms, including shortness of breath, respiratory failure, chest pain, and coughing. In addition to silicosis, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and kidney disease can develop as a result of breathing in silica.

What you can do

To avoid breathing dust when working with silica:

- Use blasting cabinets and local exhaust ventilation.
- Use wet methods for activities that generate a lot of dust such as cutting, grinding, drilling, and sawing.
- If possible, substitute noncrystalline silica blasting material.
- Use respirators approved for protection against silica (if sandblasting, use abrasive blasting respirators).
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke near crystalline silica dust. Before doing so, wash hands and face.
- If possible, do not use compressed air for cleaning surfaces. Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) vacuum or a wet sweeping method.

Silica Dust: Quiz

1. About ____ million U.S. workers are exposed to silica dust.
A. 1.2
B. 2.3
C. 3.4
2. Silicosis is a lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust. TRUE or FALSE.
3. ____ cutting methods can significantly reduce the dust generated while cutting.
A. Wet
B. Dry
4. The best way to clean up silica dust is by using compressed air. TRUE or FALSE.

1. **B.** 2.3 million workers across many industries are exposed to silica dust. The families of these workers may also be exposed if contaminated clothing is worn home.
2. **TRUE.** Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust. It is very important to protect yourself from breathing crystalline silica dust to prevent this and other diseases.
3. **A.** Wet cutting methods reduce the generation of dust.
4. **FALSE.** If possible, avoid using compressed air that will blow dust around (but if you do, ensure adequate ventilation). Instead, use a vacuum with a filter or wet sweeping method. Tightly close the containers of silica-containing waste to prevent the dust from escaping and becoming airborne.

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