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For Immediate Release

UPDATE: Flu Could Cost Employers Over \$21B **IS THE OPEN OFFICE MAKING WORKERS SICK?**

CHICAGO, February 14, 2018 – After the most recent flu update from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during which officials stated the flu season has yet to peak and activity is as high as in 2009, global outplacement and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. revised its estimate on the cost of lost productivity to employers due to the flu to over \$21 billion.

“The flu season is still going strong and workers continue to fall ill. One potential driver of the spread of the flu could be the open office trend that so many companies implemented in the last decade,” said Andrew Challenger, Vice President of global outplacement consultancy Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“When you take away walls, workers are in near constant contact with one another. During an aggressive flu season, this could affect entire companies, especially for the small and mid-size firms and start-ups that so often utilize this concept,” said Challenger.

Employers, especially those with open offices and shared workspaces, should treat these spaces and other common areas as gyms treat exercise equipment. This includes daily cleanings of all surfaces with disinfectant. Employers should also keep soap and hand sanitizer in plentiful supply.

“Encourage any employees who have been sick to wipe down or clean their briefcases, wallets, phones and/or phone cases, or bags that they bring with them to the office on a daily basis. Basically, do whatever you can to remove germs that could spread this virus,” said Challenger.

According to the CDC, the 2009 H1N1 strain sickened an estimated 60.8 million people, with more than 40 million over the age of 18. We estimate about 25 million workers could become sick due to this season's high flu activity.

Productivity Loss Estimates:

Updated Estimate (2/14/2018)

25,000,000 estimated workers sickened

\$26.74 – average hourly wage (preliminary data for January 2018 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics)

\$855.68 – average wages lost due to missing four eight-hour shifts

Estimated Losses: \$21.39B

Updated Estimate (2/2/2018)

18,100,827-24,641,000 estimated workers sickened

\$26.63 – average hourly wage

\$852.16 – average wages lost due to missing four eight-hour shifts

Estimated Losses: \$15.4B-\$20.9B

Challenger's Initial Estimate (based on 2015-2016 flu season)

11,049,083 estimated workers sickened

\$26.63 – average hourly wage

\$852.16 – average wages lost due to missing four eight-hour shifts

Estimated Losses: \$9.4B

2014-2015 Productivity Loss Estimate

18,100,827 estimated workers sickened

\$25.26 – average hourly wage

\$808.32 – average wages lost due to missing four eight-hour shifts

Estimated Losses: \$14.6B

2013-2014 Productivity Loss Estimate

17,166,702 estimated workers sickened

\$24.19 – average hourly wage

\$774.08 – average wages lost due to missing four eight-hour shifts

Estimated Losses: \$13.3B

Challenger offered additional tips employers might consider to halt the spread of the flu:

- Increase the number of shifts. This will reduce the amount of people working in the office at one time.
- Limit meetings. If there is no need to gather large groups of workers in a confined space, then do not do it. Conduct meetings via conference calls or video conferencing.
- Expand telecommuting. Determine who can work from home or other locations. This will keep people off of public transportation and out of the office.
- Allow sick workers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs.
- Institute flexible leave policies to allow parents to care for a sick child or one who is home due to school closures.
- Provide no-touch trash cans and hand sanitizer.
- Encourage employees to wash their hands frequently, avoid handshakes, and take other hygienic precautions, such as wearing a mask in heavily populated work areas.

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