

# State of Michigan Employees For Your Benefit

provides a variety of timely information related  
to your health care benefits and needs



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## Don't get cold feet

Winter can be beautiful. There's so much to do — snow skiing or sledding, a rough game of ice hockey or placid ice skating, or just going outside to shovel the snow. During cold and damp weather, it's important to protect your feet by keeping them warm and dry.

### Keep your boots on

Without warm, dry clothes, any wintertime outdoor activity is a potential health risk. Proper footwear — insulated, waterproof boots or shoes — is as important as coats, hats or gloves during the winter.

Boots should be snug but not tight. If your boots are too loose, your toes can get irritated in the toe box. If your boots are too tight, pressure can lead to blisters and abrasions. Tight footwear also may slow circulation and cause cold feet. Also, minimize activities that reduce circulation, such as sitting or standing in a cold environment for a long time. Socks are also important. Change them daily. Wear thicker, non-constricting socks made of acrylic fibers or a blend to “wick” away moisture caused by perspiration in boots.

### What to do if the cold gets to you

Feet soaked in snow should get back indoors quickly. In sub-freezing temperatures, soaked feet are in immediate danger of frostbite, trench foot or hypothermia.

**Frostbite** happens when skin tissue actually freezes and cell damage results. The freezing point of skin is about 30°F. Wind chill can be a significant factor in



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## Cold feet *continued from pg 1*

speeding up the process. Frostbite is characterized by white, waxy skin that feels numb and hard. Fingers, toes, cheeks, the nose and ears are primarily affected. The symptoms of frostbite include uncomfortable sensations of coldness; there may be a tingling, stinging or aching feeling followed by numbness. Initially, the frostbitten area appears white and is cold to the touch. This is followed by heat, redness and swelling.

Tissue damage can be mild and reversible or severe, resulting in scarring and tissue death. Amputation or loss of function can be an unfortunate result. Frostbite may require immediate emergency attention. However, if it's not severe, apply warm water at 102°F to 110°F to the affected area. Don't use a heating pad. Be careful to avoid rubbing frostbitten areas because this can lead to greater tissue injury. If there's a chance for re-freezing, don't re-warm the affected areas.

**Trench foot** is caused by long, continuous exposure to a wet and cold environment, or actual immersion in water. Symptoms include a tingling or itching sensation, pain and swelling. Blisters may form and be followed by death of skin tissue and ulceration.

First aid treatment for trench foot is similar to the treatment for frostbite, and includes moving the victim to a warm area, treating the affected part with warm water (102°F to 110°F) or warm packs, arranging bed rest in a warm environment and obtaining medical assistance as soon as possible.

**Hypothermia** occurs when a person's body temperature falls and the body can't produce heat as fast as it's lost. It's a life-threatening condition when the body's core temperature falls below 95°F. Symptoms include shivering, slurred speech, fumbling hands and memory lapses. The skin is ice cold and may appear blue in color. Muscles may become stiff and rigid. The pulse and breathing slow down and pupils become dilated.



If you suspect that someone has hypothermia, the first step is to get the person out of the cold and into a warmer atmosphere. Handle them gently, because rough handling may cause a cardiac arrest. If their clothes are wet, change them into dry clothes. Wrap them in some type of insulation such as a blanket, towels, sheets, pillows or even newspapers. Since most of a person's body heat is lost through the head, make sure you cover the head as well. Then lay them flat and call for emergency medical assistance. Never try to warm them with warm water or a heating pad or attempt to warm them with body to body contact. Shivering is the body's built-in defense against a falling body temperature and can provide more heat than most other methods.

To avoid hypothermia, always dress warmly in uncertain weather. If you're traveling by car, carry an emergency box in your trunk with blankets, hats, mittens and an extra change of clothing.

Be prepared and enjoy the weather.

## Ear infections are a common pain in children

Three out of four children experience an ear infection, known as otitis media, by the time they are 3 years old. In fact, ear infections are the most common illnesses in babies and young children. Some kids are particularly susceptible because of environmental and lifestyle factors. Some of these risk factors are:

- Exposure to frequent colds in day care
- Secondhand tobacco smoke
- Taking a bottle or pacifier to bed
- Family history

### Types of ear infections

There are two main types of ear infections: acute otitis media (AOM) and otitis media with fluid (OME). AOM is the initial ear infection, when parts of the ear are infected and swollen, and fluid and mucus are trapped inside. It can be extremely painful. OME

occurs after the infection is gone, but fluid and mucus stay trapped in the ear. This fluid can affect your child's hearing.

### How ear infections happen

A child develops an ear infection when viruses or bacteria get inside the ear and cause an infection. It often happens because of allergies or an illness, such as a cold. It's harder for children to fight illnesses than it's for adults, so children develop ear infections more often.

Ear infections can be tricky. An ear infection may last two days or two weeks. It may improve within 48 hours without treatment. Or it may need to be treated using antibiotics for a week to 10 days. In most children, the ear infection clears right after the antibiotic treatment. For some children, fluid may stay in the middle ear for two weeks to two months even after antibiotic treatment.

**Ear infections** continued on pg 4

## Sweaty winter feet?

Even if you're running in the snow, your feet are still susceptible to the cold, especially if you're wearing nylon running shoes. Feet will sweat while running and cold will permeate the material, inviting a serious condition. Sweaty feet and winter are a bad combination. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, wet feet lose heat 25 times faster than dry feet.

To compensate, the body shuts down "less essential" circulation. Less blood circulating to the feet means less oxygen and nutrients, and skin tissue begins to die, a condition which can lead to trench foot. Cover your feet with antiperspirant. The active ingredient, aluminum hydroxide, keeps your feet from sweating.

Source: [footcaredirect.com](http://footcaredirect.com)\*

\*Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan does not control this website or endorse its general content.



## Ear infection can affect hearing

An ear infection not only causes severe pain, but also may result in serious complications if it isn't treated. An untreated infection can travel from the middle ear to the nearby parts of the head, including the brain. Although the hearing loss caused by the infection is usually temporary, untreated ear infection may lead to permanent hearing impairment. Too much fluid in the ear can put pressure on the eardrum and eventually tear it. Keeping fluid in the middle ear with chronic ear infections can reduce a child's hearing at a time that's critical for speech and language development. Children who have early hearing impairment from frequent ear infections are likely to have speech and language disabilities.

Permanent hearing loss is rare from an ear infection, but your child needs to go to the doctor if you suspect he or she has one.

## Treatment

The doctor will examine your child's ear. Antibiotics may be the first course of treatment for bacterial ear infections. However, many ear infections are viral and cannot be treated with antibiotics. These infections need to get better on their own, and only time can help them heal. Your doctor can tell whether the ear infection is bacterial or viral, and the best method of treatment. If your child is experiencing pain, the doctor may also recommend a pain reliever. Avoid over-the-counter cold medicines (decongestants and antihistamines) because they don't help ear infections. As always,

**Ear infections** continued on pg 5

## Signs of hearing loss in children

Hearing loss is the single most common birth defect in America. Have your child's hearing checked if he or she:

- Vocalizes baby talk that's not progressing and remains monotonous.
- Has difficulty locating sounds.
- Isn't startled by loud sounds.
- Can't speak and understand spoken language according to the appropriate age level.
- Daydreams and withdraws in social situations.
- Has frequent ear infections.

Call your doctor. Although these signs don't necessarily mean that your child has a hearing problem, but it's best to be sure when it comes to your little one.



Source: League for the Hard of Hearing

## What do you know about the flu?

Test your flu vaccine savvy with these true or false questions, then check your answers on page 7.



### True or false?

- 1: People can die from the flu.
- 2: Even if I get the flu vaccine, I can still get a mild case of the flu.
- 3: The side effects of the flu vaccine are worse than the flu.
- 4: Not everyone can take the flu vaccine.
- 5: Only older people need flu vaccine.
- 6: You must get the flu vaccine before December.

### Ear infections *continued from pg 4*

aspirin should never be given to children for pain or fever as it has been associated with Reye's syndrome, a disease that affects the liver and brain.

Some children with chronic ear infections need surgery. Surgery may also be suggested to drain fluid from the middle ear and insert a ventilation tube if the child has a hearing loss or speech delay. Because most children have had infections in both ears, surgery is typically done in both ears. A tiny tube is inserted into the eardrum to ventilate and equalize pressure in the middle ear. This will help to prevent infection and fluid accumulation. Hearing should be restored. Depending on the type of tube used, the tube remains in place for about six to 18 months or more.

### Prevention

Obviously, preventing an ear infection is better than trying to treat one. Limiting the risk factors is one way to prevent ear infections. You should:

- Minimize exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Consider breast-feeding instead of using formula if ear infections are common in your family.
- Avoid contact with children who are sick with viruses.
- Eliminate pacifier use.

Although repeated ear infections are extremely frustrating, they're usually only a temporary problem. With proper care, you and your doctor can manage these infections when your child is young. They'll probably stop altogether as your child gets older.

# Clean hands save lives

Keeping your hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing your hands with soap and clean, running water. However, if soap and clean water aren't accessible, use soap and available water or an alcohol-based product containing at least 60 percent alcohol to clean hands.

## Tips and instructions

### When washing your hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water. Use warm water if it's available. Apply soap. Antibacterial soaps are OK to use, but regular soap works fine.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing your hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the door if you're in a public restroom.

### When should you wash your hands?

- Before and after preparing food
- After any contact with juices from uncooked meats and poultry; these animal products may be contaminated with a variety of illness-causing bacteria
- Before and after eating food
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet

- Before and after tending to someone who is sick
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- After handling garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After contact with items that are likely to have been touched by many people such as money, counters, door handles, etc.

### When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply the product to the palm of one hand, using the amount of product indicated on the label.
- Rub your hands together.
- Rub the product over your entire hand and all of your fingers until they're dry.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



## Here're some myths and facts about washing your hands.

**MYTH:** You should wash your hands with hot water.

**FACT:** Use warm, but not hot, water to wash your hands. Water that's too hot or too cold can crack the skin, providing a portal of entry for bacteria.

**MYTH:** Proper hand-washing consists of washing your hands for at least 30 seconds with soap under running water.

**FACT:** Not quite. Proper hand washing begins by wetting your hands under warm running water and then thoroughly applying soap or detergent over all areas of both hands. If you use bar soap, rinse it before you use it to remove viruses or bacteria that may have been left from previous users. Scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers. Remember to clean under your fingernails, too. Dry your hands on a paper towel, then use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.

**MYTH:** Cloth towels work fine to dry hands.

**FACT:** Bacteria numbers increase in damp towels leading to recontamination of hands. A paper towel is your best choice for drying hands.

## Flu quiz: answers

### 1: True

Flu is a highly infectious disease of the lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu.<sup>1</sup>

### 2: True

Flu vaccine protects most people from the flu. People who receive the flu vaccine can get the flu but it'll be far less sick than someone who has the flu and hasn't received the flu vaccine. The flu vaccine doesn't protect you from other viruses that sometimes feel like the flu.

### 3: False

The worst side effect you're likely to get with an injectable vaccine is a sore arm.

### 4: True

You might not be able to get this protection if you're allergic to eggs, are very sick with a high fever or have had a severe reaction to the flu vaccine in the past.

### 5: False

Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease need to get a flu vaccine. People who are active and healthy can also benefit from the protection that the flu vaccine offers.

### 6: False

Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. While the best time to get a flu vaccine is October or November, getting vaccinated in December or later can still protect you against the flu.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Thermometers are the best way to detect a fever

Colds, flu, fevers and children seem to go hand-in-hand during the winter months. A fever is an important part of the body's defense against infection. Most bacteria and viruses that cause infections thrive best at 98.6°F. Although a fever signals that a battle might be going on in the body, the fever is fighting for the body, not against.

If you're worried about your child being sick, please call your doctor. Don't be surprised if your doctor asks you if your child has a fever, and if so, how high. Be prepared and choose a thermometer that's best for you and your family.

**Normal body temperatures** vary from person to person. Average body temperature is:

Oral: 98.6°F

Ear: 99.6°F

Armpit (auxiliary): 97.6°F



## Types of thermometers

Today, there are many thermometer options. Here are some choices:

### Digital thermometers

- Used in the mouth or armpit
- Used for people of any age
- Are quick and easy to read
- Most accurate.
- Keep batteries handy.

### Ear thermometers (infrared thermometers)

- Used for infants and adults
- Quick
- Must be properly placed in the ear for an accurate temperature
- Excessive ear wax can interfere with accuracy
- Expensive

### Fever strips, pacifier thermometers and forehead thermometers

- Very quick
- Not as accurate as other types of thermometers
- Can be expensive

### Glass thermometers containing mercury

- Don't use one because the mercury in it is toxic and can be released if the thermometer breaks
- Don't throw it in the trash; call your local government for disposal instructions

**Thermometers** continued on pg 9



### Tips for taking temperature

- Always stay with your child when a thermometer is in place.
- Keep separate, marked thermometers for oral and armpit readings.
- Read all directions before using the thermometer, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Try practicing on healthy family members to be sure you're using the thermometer correctly.
- Choose a thermometer that's easy to read.
- Use a new disposable cover for each use; don't reuse disposable covers. If you don't have a cover, clean the thermometer after each use as advised by the manufacturer.
- Don't use an oral temperature if the person has a stuffy nose. Put the thermometer in the person's armpit.
- Don't smoke or eat or drink anything hot or cold for 10 minutes before taking an oral temperature.

When you call the doctor, report the actual reading on the thermometer, and say where the temperature was taken. Be sure to read decimal places correctly — 104°F is not the same as 100.4°F.

## Thermometers continued from pg 8

### How to take a temperature

#### Oral temperature

Recommended for anyone older than 4 years of age who can cooperate and understand directions.

- Make sure the mouth is clear of gum, candy and food. Use a disposable cover. Place the thermometer under the tongue, to one side of the center, and close the lips tightly around it.
- Follow the thermometer's instructions for how long to leave it in the mouth.
- Remove and read the thermometer.
- Throw disposable cover in the trash; clean the thermometer.
- Wash your hands.

#### Ear temperature

- Requires a special thermometer that should only be used for checking ear temperatures.
- Not reliable for infants under 6 months.
- On a cold day, the person should be indoors for at least 15 minutes before taking an ear temperature.
- Don't put the thermometer in water.
- Use a disposable cover. Place the probe in the ear canal and turn the thermometer on.
- Gently pull the earlobe down and back.
- Center the probe tip in the ear and push gently inward toward the eardrum.

Thermometers continued on pg 11

## When in doubt, throw it out

You look in the fridge and see a slice of leftover pizza. Perfect for a snack. But you can't remember how long it's been there. Caution: food poisoning may be right around the corner. Keep the list below handy. And remember...when in doubt, throw it out.



Product	Refrigerator (40° F)	Freezer (0° F)
Eggs, fresh, in shell	3 to 5 weeks	Do not freeze
Mayonnaise (refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Do not freeze
Frozen dinners and entrees; keep frozen until ready to heat	Don't store in refrigerator	3 to 4 months
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, ham, tuna and macaroni salads	3 to 5 days	Doesn't freeze well
Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	1 to 2 months
Hot dogs, unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months
Luncheon meat, opened package	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Luncheon meat, unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months
Bacon	7 days	1 month
Sausage, raw — chicken, turkey, pork, beef	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months
Hamburger and ground meat	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
Soups and stews, vegetable or meat added	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months

Product	Refrigerator (40° F)	Freezer (0° F)
Cooked meat and meat casserole leftovers	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months
Chicken or turkey, pieces	1 to 2 days	9 months
Fried chicken	3 to 4 days	4 months
Cooked poultry casseroles	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months
Poultry pieces, plain	3 to 4 days	4 months
Pieces covered with broth, gravy	1 to 2 days	6 months
Chicken nuggets, patties	1 to 2 days	1 to 3 months
Pizza, cooked	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months

### Thermometers [continued from pg 9](#)

- Press the button. Follow the thermometer's instructions for how long to leave it in the ear.
- Remove and read the thermometer.
- Throw the disposable cover in the trash. Wipe the probe with a dry cloth and put it away.
- Wash your hands.

### Armpit (auxiliary) temperature

- Make sure the armpit is dry.
- Place the tip of the thermometer in the center of the armpit and make sure skin surfaces are touching the thermometer.
- Press the arm against the body.
- Follow the thermometer's instructions for how long to leave it in the armpit.
- Remove and read the thermometer.
- Throw away the used disposable cover, or clean and dry the thermometer right away.
- Wash your hands.



# For Your Benefit

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