

Sickness in the Workplace

In May 2007 Medibank Private commissioned a study investigating sickness in the workplace, otherwise referred to as presenteeism. This refers to the loss of productivity of workers attending work while sick or injured. Presenteeism is estimated to cost the economy and Australian businesses \$25 billion each year.

On-the-job productivity accounts directly for 68% of the total cost, while the remaining 32% is due to indirect loss filtering down through the economy. For Australian businesses this translates into an average productivity loss of 6 days per year per employee.

The study investigated the impact of 4 key factors.

unhealthy lifestyle Risky behaviours and detrimental lifestyle contribute to a person's health status, and may significantly increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.

workers attending work while ill People simply do not perform well when ill. Attending work while ill increases the risk of spreading infections.

allergies / asthma Can be especially prevalent during seasonal changes, and typically includes hay fever season.

job-related stress work-life imbalance Workplace stress and job dissatisfaction may lead to mental health issues or indeed a worsening of medical conditions.

Study respondents estimated their productivity level was reduced by as much 45%. Unclear thinking, increased mistakes, unscheduled breaks and difficulty working the required hours were highlighted as problematic while working when ill.

Conditions significantly impacting on presenteeism were identified as

- Depression and Allergies equally at (19%)
- Hypertension (14%)
- Diabetes (9%)
- Back, neck & spinal problems and Asthmas equally at (8%)
- Migraines / headaches (6%)
- Cancer, respiratory problems & arthritis, equally at (4%)
- Eczema & other skin conditions (3%)
- Hypertension (2%)

reducing presenteeism

Businesses that support the health and well being of employees can reduce presenteeism by investing in well-being strategies and programs. The strategies need to include gathering information via health-risk assessments. Information gleaned can then be used to develop preventative programs and provide services to assist employees. Businesses can work towards increasing productivity and minimising presenteeism by fostering a workplace culture that values healthy lifestyle through the introduction of wellbeing programs.



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