

# SICK note

Don't spread your germs, stay at home. [Bryony Taylor](#) investigated the impact illness has on you and your colleagues.

If you didn't already know that winter was here with all of its bouts of viruses and bugs, you might have noticed your colleague cowering in the corner of the office clutching their mug from home safe to their chest. It sounds like an odd sight, but it is one which is increasingly common during the winter period, as workers try to combat the onset of panic regarding illnesses such as the norovirus.

You may laugh as your desk mate removes his clean, sparkling, shrink wrapped mug from his bag each day, but actually they might be on to something, and they are definitely not alone. New consumer research has discovered that when it comes to battling coughs and colds it's the workplace that takes no prisoners.

A survey of 4,000 adults conducted by cough medicine manufacturer Covonia, revealed that people believe they are more likely to catch a cold at work than anywhere else. Nearly a third of people think their colleagues are responsible for giving them the typical two annual illnesses, with public transport and family members coming in a distant second and third place with only around 17%.

Those who do end up suffering during the cold snap often refuse to take a day off work to recover. Nearly 60% of people muddled through their average 13 days of symptoms a year. However, the survey

showed that nearly 74% of those questioned would prefer their ill colleagues to take time off to curb the spread of the germs.

The survey also revealed that people also got increasingly annoyed by their workmates sniffing (40%), whining and moaning (41%) and their desks of crumpled, used tissues (27%). Alyn Morice, professor of respiratory medicine at Hull University said: "Over nine million people battle with colds each winter, falling victim to one of the 200 cold viruses in circulation in the UK. A dramatic difference could be made in the amount of cases we see if people only started taking a more proactive approach to dealing with their illness."

All is not lost however. Reports in British newspapers at the beginning of this year suggested that a Cambridge based company called Acambis, have been developing a universal vaccine that would zap all strains of cold and flu. Instead of singling out specific strains of the virus, the new vaccine focuses on parts of the virus that do not mutate. If development is accelerated to deal with the prospect of pandemics, the vaccine could be available by 2011.

So you can now breathe a sigh of relief (if you can breathe that is) that in just over a few years time, the prospect of a flu infected winter may be something you can only read about in magazine's like this. ●



→ A survey of 4,000 adults conducted by cough medicine manufacturer Covonia, revealed that people believe they are more likely to catch a cold at work than anywhere else