

# Safety News

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News About Occupational Safety and Health in **STATE CONTRACT AGENCIES**

## Pay Attention at Work

**W**hen you are interrupted or become distracted, your focus is temporarily taken away from what you are doing. This lapse in attention could result in a critical work mistake or divert your safety focus and result in an injury or death. Although some distractions and interruptions in the workplace are unavoidable, others can be managed, minimized, or eliminated.



Loud conversations, the ringing of phones, faxes, copiers, printers, are common in the workplace and can be a distraction to those who are hard at work concentrating on a task. When possible, place these items in common or semi-enclosed areas.

When workers ask questions, they may sometimes interrupt each other. Minimize the occurrence of these interruptions by having procedural manuals and handbooks centrally located and easily accessible. Or, place a “Do Not Disturb” sign near your work area. If you have a question of someone, and notice they are in a critical phase of a task, wait until they’re finished to pose your question. If an immediate answer to a question is unavoidable, stop what you’re doing and shut down the power tool, equipment, or processes before you respond. Schedule a set time and place for discussions in a break

room or conference room. If you’re having a short, impromptu conversation, keep your voice low or move to a hallway or unoccupied area.

Cell phones and electronic devices can also be distracting. Silence personal devices while working or keep the volume low or in

vibration mode. Also keep in mind that the music you are listening to might be enjoyable and relaxing to you but others may find it annoying and distracting. If you’re in the middle of a task that requires a great deal of concentration, don’t answer the phone or check text messages; let the device save the message, then check it when you’ve finished with your task. Never talk and walk around while you’re on the phone. Talking on the phone takes your focus off possible safety hazards around you; you might absentmindedly walk into the path of a vehicle or slip, trip, or fall down into a piece of operating equipment.

Stay focused on the job at hand. Don’t let interruptions distract from your job and your safety. Horseplay in the workplace is not only distracting but also unprofessional and unsafe. Talk with your supervisor about any distractions that may be preventing you from concentrating on your job and working safely. □

## The Dangers of MRSA

You may carry a common bacterium on your skin, nasal passages, and fingernails yet be completely unaware of it. This bacterium, known as “staph” (*Staphylococcus aureus*), is the cause of many common skin infections, most of which heal on their own if treated with antibiotics. Hospitals have been dealing with antibiotic-resistant staph bacteria for years. However, in the 1990s a slightly different strain of staph (*methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus* also known as MRSA or CA-MRSA) began to appear. While MRSA can usually be treated, it’s important to know how it’s transmitted, who are at the greatest risk, how to prevent contracting it, how to identify an infection, and what to do if you suspect you have MRSA.

MRSA is not airborne. It’s primarily spread by direct skin-to-skin human contact or contact with an infected wound or skin opening such as a cut or abrasion. But, it can also be spread by contact with contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, or poor hygiene. Healthy people can have MRSA with no symptoms, but, they can pass it on – with serious and sometimes fatal consequences – to vulnerable persons like the very young or old,

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## FROM OUR EXPERT

# Integrating Employee Health and Wellness

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends integrating wellness with safety to protect, preserve, and improve the health and well-being of workers. This approach has been shown to reduce healthcare insurance costs, lower workers' compensation premiums by reducing injuries, and increase productivity for businesses, while improving quality of life for workers.

Wellness programs are necessary to educate and engage the workforce. Rates of obesity, arthritis, stress, and other chronic health conditions are at all time highs in the working population. While these conditions may result from factors outside of the workplace, they have a detrimental effect on business outcomes. Since employees spend a significant portion of their lives in the workplace, it seems like the optimal place to introduce wellness and lifestyle topics. The workplace provides opportunities for education on a variety of topics including healthy eating, the importance of physical activity, and the benefits of smoking cessation, as well as a built-in peer support structure from



other program participants.

As recently as 1996, obesity rates in the adult population nationwide were below 20%. In 2010, no state had a prevalence of obesity less than 20%. In California, 24% of the adult population is obese. (*Data from Centers for Disease Control – Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*) Individual choices drive this epidemic, but it is exacerbated by the sedentary nature of the knowledge-based, service economy. The introduction of nutritional education and physical activity through health promotion programs has been shown to have a positive effect at individual workplaces.

One way to introduce physical activity and

possibly integrate nutrition is to perform a “walkability” audit of the area surrounding a business. While the main focus is to identify safe and attractive walking routes around the worksite and surrounding neighborhood to introduce physical activity during breaks, an additional benefit is the ability to highlight healthy eating options within walking distance.

An intervention at the Koger Center Rhodes Building in Atlanta including painting, carpeting, framed artwork, motivational signs, and music, showed increased stairwell use by building occupants. Information on this study and implementing a stairwell improvement project can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/toolkits/stairwell/index.htm>.

A variety of toolkits and resources for starting a successful health promotion program can be found online at the NIOSH Total Worker Health website. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/>. □

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### The Dangers of MRSA continued from page 1

persons with weakened immune systems, those with other medical problems, or those who get the bacteria into their bloodstream.

The best defense in protecting yourself from contracting MRSA is to practice good hygiene.

- Proper hand washing with soap and warm water or use alcohol based hand sanitizers
- Keep wounds, cuts, and abrasions clean and covered with a sterile bandage until they are healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels,

razors, deodorant, or soap.

- Wash dirty clothes, linens, uniforms, and towels with hot water and laundry detergent.
- Use a hot dryer rather than air-drying. Clean and disinfect gym and sports equipment before use.

MRSA can cause skin infections that may emerge as a persistent red pimple, boil, or blister. It can be hot to the touch, swollen, painful, and have pus or other drainage. More serious infections can cause pneumonia or infect the bloodstream, urinary tract, or surgical wound infections. If you suspect that you may

have contracted MRSA, contact your healthcare provider for MRSA testing and treatment. Then follow treatment recommendations completely to avoid a reoccurrence of the infection. □







## Loss Control Services

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## Listeria Outbreak in the United States

The United States has been experiencing an outbreak of *Listeriosis*, an infection caused by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. Sources of the contamination have been traced to contaminated melons originating in Colorado, and bags of romaine lettuce originating in California. At the time of this writing, the infection has been linked to 28 deaths and 133 infections.

We would like to remind our policyholders that prevention is always the best defense against infection. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water when cooking and before consumption of food. Wash raw vegetables, cook raw food thoroughly, and avoid unpasteurized foods.

Symptoms start as flu-like – diarrhea, cramping pain, headaches and fever in children, the elderly, and anyone suffering from an immune-compromising illness. Pregnant women are especially at risk as the infection could lead to premature delivery, still-birth, or miscarriage.

If you suspect that you may be infected, visit your healthcare provider who will determine if further testing is necessary based on symptoms. Testing is done with stool and blood cultures. Treatment is given through aggressive antibiotics.

Health officials recommend disposing of any produce suspected of carrying the bacterium.

For further information, refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/>

## Employer Education Series

We at State Fund take pride in our mission to help make California workplaces safer. Our Employer Education Series seminars are just one of the ways that we partner with employers and the public to help businesses reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, and facilitate regulatory compliance.

Our seminar program is designed to provide information and ideas to help employers comply with regulations, maintain safe worksites, and protect employees. Our convenient half-day seminars are located in State Fund regional offices, and your workplace safety questions will be answered by industry experts.

We offer more than 100 workers' compensation and health and safety seminars to employers and the public throughout California every year, and these seminars are provided at no cost to you.

Visit <http://www.statefundca.com/safety/SafetyAndSeminars.asp> to see what new seminar topics are being offered in your area. Seating is limited so, register early!

## Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health.

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