Office DEPOT BUSINESS



Flu Season Hits Fast. Is Your Facility Ready?

Many healthcare facilities start thinking about flu season once the first patients walk in with symptoms. By then, the ordering window has already narrowed, and lead times on PPE, cleaning supplies and front-of-house essentials can stretch longer than a busy facility can afford to wait.

Flu activity in the U.S. typically peaks between December and February, though the timing and severity can shift from year to year.[1] That variability is why prep can't wait for a forecast. Treat flu season readiness as a checklist to work through in early fall, before case counts start rising. Here are four areas worth reviewing:

Here are some tips to consider:

1 Rethink PPE by size, not just supply

Gloves, masks and gowns are obvious supplies, and most facilities already have a standing order in place. The gap that tends to catch teams off guard isn't volume, it's sizing.

Ordering a flat quantity across small, medium and large rarely matches how staff actually use PPE day to day. Pull usage data from last flu season and break it down by size before placing this year's order. A facility that burned through mediums twice as fast as larges last January is likely to see the same pattern repeat.

It's also worth checking distribution, not just inventory. PPE that's centralized in one supply room may slow staff down during high-volume shifts. Confirm that gloves, masks and gowns are stocked at the point of care, not just in the back closet, so staff aren't walking across the facility mid-shift to restock.

2 Close the hand hygiene supply gaps that budgets miss

Sanitizer dispensers near entrances usually get attention heading into flu season. What often gets missed are the items that run out fastest and may not make it into the budget conversation – soap refills, disposable hand towels and the dispensers themselves as units age and wear down.

A walk-through of the facility before flu season starts is worth the time. Check that every dispenser is functioning and confirm that each station has a backup refill on hand.



3 Set a reorder point for disinfecting supplies

Waiting room chairs, check-in counters, door handles and shared equipment like blood pressure cuffs see constant contact from multiple patients throughout the flu season. Facilities relying on general-purpose cleaning products often go through wipes and sprays faster than expected once patient traffic increases. Rather than reordering when supplies start running low, set a specific reorder point, a stock level that automatically triggers a new order. This helps remove the guess work during the weeks when staff have the least time to track inventory manually.

4 Don't overlook the waiting room and front desk

Flu season drives more foot traffic than a typical week. Sick visits, walk-ins and patients waiting on test results all add up to a fuller waiting room and a busier front desk.

That traffic shows up in less obvious places too. Front desk staff handle more paperwork tied to flu season, insurance forms, intake documentation and related records, all of which utilize office supplies faster than usual. Tissues, trash cans and basic waiting room items can see the same demand spike as clinical supplies. Higher patient volume means higher use across the board, not just in exam rooms.

Reviewing waiting room and front desk stock alongside clinical supplies helps keep one area from running short while the other stays fully stocked.

Build the checklist now

Flu season doesn't wait for a facility to feel ready. It can arrive earlier and hit harder than a typical planning calendar assumes. Reviewing PPE by size, checking hand cleaning stations, setting a reorder point for disinfecting supplies and accounting for waiting room and front desk demand before the season starts helps put a facility ahead of the curve instead of catching up to it.

Office Depot Business works with healthcare facilities to build out flu season ordering plans, from PPE sizing to breakroom and front desk supplies, so teams can finalize their checklist well before patient volume picks up.



[1] https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season.html

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