

Worksite health screening

Imagine an employee with unrecognized high blood pressure who is slowly developing damage to arteries and major organs. One day, this employee has a serious heart attack requiring prolonged hospitalization, intensive medical and surgical treatment and extensive rehabilitation. Now imagine that the high blood pressure had been detected early at a worksite health screening and successfully treated. The employee maintains good health and the employer avoids medical claims costs and lost productivity. This is the promise of worksite health screening.

In addition to early detection of illness, worksite health screenings are also a low-cost, high-profile way to enlist employees in improving their health. Some employees avoid preventive medical care and miss the opportunity to address the behaviors that cause chronic illness, like inactivity, obesity and tobacco use. Worksite screenings can identify employees with these lifestyle risks, and a nurse or health educator can counsel individuals about the consequences of their choices and make available opportunities to help them change. Particularly when part of a broader health promotion program, this type of direct medical contact can successfully motivate employees to change their behavior.

Besides the goodwill generated by the employer's desire to support better employee health, the employer can also access the cumulative results of the group. While individual results are confidential and protected, the results for the group as a whole can give important insight into the overall health status of the group. This enables planning to address the most compelling risks through directed health promotion programs and gives early warning of future claims costs, which can be important in managing the health benefit program.

Worksite health screening is a proven approach to lowering health benefit costs. A successful event will bring value to employers and employees beyond prompt identification of treatable illness. But having a successful worksite screening also means knowing what to screen for and what to avoid.

What to include in every worksite health screening

Worksite testing should be limited to activities that have been proven to be effective in identifying illness for which early intervention makes a real, measurable impact. These activities must also be practical to administer in a work setting. They include the following:

1. Blood sugar — a quick finger stick can provide early indication of diabetes. Fasting is more accurate than a random measurement, but is not essential.

2. Cholesterol – a total cholesterol reading can be performed via finger stick, with the results immediately available.
3. Blood pressure – one of the most important measurements can alert participants to a very dangerous (but very treatable) medical condition.
4. Body fat – most often based on height and weight to determine body mass index (BMI), an indirect and occasionally misleading predictor of obesity, body fat content can also be measured directly, which can provide more compelling results
5. Health risk assessment (HRA) – this survey is best performed online to allow for a more detailed evaluation and better modeling of results. An HRA can uncover other health risks, such as depression and substance abuse. It also provides the employee with a record of the results, facilitation action.
6. Coaching – an exit interview with a health coach can help clarify any findings of the screening, address any questions or concerns the employee might have and help plan the next steps to address the risks or illnesses identified.

What might be included in some settings:

For some employee populations, other health screening measures may also make sense:

1. Flu vaccination – if the screening is planned for late September, October or November, consider including flu vaccines.
2. Mammography – especially in rural locations or areas underserved by conventional mammography, mobile mammography can provide life-saving early detection of breast cancer.
3. Vision Screening - particularly where the employee population has a high proportion of employees over age 50, vision screening can be helpful.

Not recommended

Some activities are inappropriate in the worksite setting or have no real value as screening activities because they are too expensive, the disease is infrequent or early detection does not change the outcome:

1. Colorectal cancer screening and pap smears tend to be inappropriate.
2. Chest X-ray has not been shown to be an effective screening measure.
3. EKG is not a cost effective way to screen for heart disease.

Implementation

There are many national and regional vendors that can deliver effective, professional screenings, typically at a cost between \$40 and \$65 per employee, depending on the number of types of screening test conducted.

Moda Health offers a variety of screenings, including biometric screenings, through Moda healthcare services and vendor partnerships.

This is also an opportunity to conduct a “health expo” showcasing your health plan, other vendors such as the employee assistance program and local resources to improve health risks, such as fitness centers and legitimate weight loss programs. While the event can be as large or as basic as needed, all screenings should be supported by a solid communication plan to reach and remind every employee, as well as have incentives for participation.

Many vendors will often donate items or services that can be raffled off to promote employee participation.

Depending on the size of your event and company, here are some action items and deliverables to consider:

- Will you research local clinics and hospitals to conduct the health screenings or hire an outside company?
- What methods of promotion will you use (company website, posters, reminder cards, T-shirts, banners, e-mail)?
- Will you need caterers for snacks or breakfast?
- Will you hold a raffle drawing to encourage employee attendance? If so, you may want to ask sponsors to donate items.
- Will you provide some kind of entertainment to make the event festive?
- Will the event be open to spouses and family members?

Communication plan for the health screening/health expo

Communication is key in promoting a health and screening event to employees, as well as obtaining sponsors. A working communication plan may look something like this:

60 days out: Create a committee from different departments within the company. These “health fair ambassadors” can notify their departments and ensure signage and messages are delivered to their workgroups. They will also be great resources in planning and working the event. If needed, approach businesses for sponsorship. Offer sponsors physical visibility at the event in exchange for raffle prizes and/or small promotional gifts for employees. Sponsors could be allowed logo space

on promotional posters, reminder cards, banners and T-shirts for the event, as well as visibility on the employee website advertising the health fair and screening event. Likely sponsors include fitness centers, weight loss centers, health food/vitamin stores, hospitals, clinics, doctors and dentist offices.

90 days out: If asking medical sponsors to conduct the screenings, approach them at least 90 days before the planned event. Hint: approach your preferred providers.

45 days out: Print materials such as reminder cards, sign-up sheets, T-shirts and posters. If necessary, rent tents, tables and chairs. If you choose to have healthy snacks, drinks and water, solidify caterers and vendors. Secure entertainment if this will be part of your event.

30 days out: Advertise the event on the company website, hang posters and distribute T-shirts. Mail reminder cards to employees.

Two weeks out: Remind vendors and presenting companies of the event. Make sure they have access to the building and know where to set up. Create nametags for vendors and health screeners. Arrange a registration table and secure employees to work the table throughout the event.

One week out: Verbally remind employees of the event through departmental meetings and e-mails. Send a voicemail (or e-mail) to all employees from the CEO or senior leadership endorsing the event. You'll want to schedule employees to attend in 15- to 30-minute increments, depending on the number and types of screenings being conducted. Make sure the schedules are e-mailed to event coordinators for scheduling and to the company's general manager or CEO, so everyone will know upper management supports and values the event.

Day of: Register vendor and screeners. Have an internal staff person on hand for supporting logistics throughout the event. Have fun!

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