

SLIPS TRIPS AND FALLS IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENT

Cynthia Roth

A potential hazard in any type of healthcare environment from clinics, hospitals, and long term care facilities is employee exposures to wet floors or spills. This also affects ambulatory patients so the need to prevent slips/trips/and falls is essential.

Another potential hazard is clutter in the walkways that can lead to slips/trips/and falls.

Keeping floors clean and dry is a major factor in reducing the possibilities of employee falling however, wet floors can also promote another health hazard of mold, fungi and bacteria that threatens both the employees as well as the patients or residents.

There are some solutions that are more costly than others. As an example, when wet processes are being performed, drainage and cleanliness are a must. Some facilities may use false floors, platforms, mats or other dry standing areas or have the employees use appropriate waterproof footgear. Warning signs must be used whenever there is an exposure to alert employees, patients and visitors to the potential hazard. Housekeeping plays a major role not just in cleaning but removing wet or slippery surfaces as soon as they are alerted to the area.

All walkways need to be free of clutter and free from stored items and they need to be kept in a sanitary condition and in good repair. Ensure handrails are available throughout all aisles and walkways and they are kept in good repair and cleaned often to prevent the spread of viruses, bacteria, etc. These will also assist in preventing slip/trips/falls from occurring. Here are some best practices to mitigate slips/trips/falls in any healthcare facility.

Other Recommended Good Work Practices:

- Keep exits free from obstruction. Access to exits must remain clear of obstructions at all times
- Ensure spills are reported and cleaned up immediately.
- Use no-skid waxes and surfaces coated with grit to create non-slip surfaces in slippery areas such as toilet and shower areas.
- Use waterproof footgear to decrease slip/fall hazards.

- Use only properly maintained ladders to reach items. Do not use stools, chairs, or boxes as substitutes for ladders.
- Re-lay or stretch carpets that bulge or have become bunched to prevent tripping hazards.
- Beware of different surface levels that change floorings such as mats under chairs or anti fatigue matting which also change flooring surfaces.
- Aisles and passageways should be sufficiently wide for easy movement and should be kept clear at all times. Temporary electrical cords that cross aisles should be taped or anchored to the floor with signage indicating the location.
- Eliminate cluttered or obstructed work areas.
- Nurses station countertops or medication carts should be free of sharp, square corners, food and drinks on surfaces.
- Use prudent housekeeping procedures such as cleaning only one side of a passageway at a time and use appropriate signage warning of the housekeeping tasks. Good lighting for all halls and stairwells is mandatory to help reduce accidents.
- Provide adequate lighting especially during night hours. You can use flashlights or low-level lighting when entering patient rooms.
- Instruct workers to use the handrail on stairs, to avoid undue speed, and to maintain an unobstructed view of the stairs ahead of them even if that means requesting help to manage a bulky load.
- Eliminate uneven floor surfaces.
- When carrying large objects, ensure employees have appropriate vision so as not to trip and encourage the use of carts which take the load off of the employee.
- Promote safe work in cramped working spaces, avoid awkward positions, and use equipment that makes lifts less awkward.
- Ensure buckets have adequate hand holds and do not fill to capacity as it increases weights and may create spillage.
-
- Provide adequate lighting especially during night hours. You can use flashlights or low-level lighting when entering patient rooms.

- Instruct workers to use the handrail on stairs, to avoid undue speed, and to maintain an unobstructed view of the stairs ahead of them even if that means requesting help to manage a bulky load.
- Eliminate uneven floor surfaces.
- When carrying large objects, ensure employees have appropriate vision so as not to trip and encourage the use of carts which take the load off of the employee.
- Promote safe work in cramped working spaces, avoid awkward positions, and use equipment that makes lifts less awkward.
- Ensure buckets have adequate hand holds and do not fill to capacity as it increases weights and may create spillage.
- All outdoor handicap as well as entry ramps outside the facility need to be kept free of snow and ice and should be striated to prevent hydroplaning
- All indoor ramps must be clearly marked and free from obstructions

Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) has federal regulations guiding safe work practices in the healthcare environment.

- [29 CFR 1910.22](#), is the OSHA regulations responsible for General Requirements (Walking/Working Surfaces

Below is a list of organizations that might prove helpful to you as well.

- The American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE) is the professional society that represents individuals responsible for the environment of care used in healthcare delivery. The membership is served by providing leadership through education and advocacy.
- The American Hospital Association (AHA) is the national organization that represents and serves all types of hospitals, health care networks, and their patients and communities. Close to 5,000 institutional, 600 associate, and 40,000 personal members come together to form the AHA.
- The American Society for Healthcare Risk Management (ASHRM) is the preeminent society for healthcare risk management. This professional organization strives to advance risk management in the healthcare field through

professional development, membership services, enhanced communications, risk management innovation, and effective governance.

- The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc. (APIC) is a multi-disciplinary voluntary international organization with over 10,000 members. Its purpose is to influence, support, and improve the quality of healthcare through practicing and managing infection control and applying epidemiology in all health settings. The organization, which is based in Washington, DC, is led by an elected board of members who volunteer their time and expertise.
- The American Biological Safety Association (ABSA) promotes biosafety as a scientific discipline. Its goals are to provide a professional association that represents the interests and needs of practitioners of biological safety, and to provide a forum for the continued and timely exchange of biosafety information.