



# Risktopics

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## Slip, trip and fall prevention for employees in the healthcare setting

### Introduction

Employee injuries from slipping, tripping and/or falling in the hospital, homecare, long-term care or other healthcare setting are the second most frequent type of employee injury for most healthcare providers. These incidents may be very costly and result in serious injury to the employee. They are usually preventable and avoidable if strong loss prevention measures are followed on a regular basis.

There are many exposures in the healthcare environment that may lead to the healthcare worker obtaining an injury from a slip, trip or fall. Hazards may exist due to:

- Slippery or wet floors
- Uneven floor or outside ground/sidewalk/parking lot surfaces
- Lifting in confined spaces
- Cluttered or obstructed work areas/passageways (This is of particular concern in the homecare environment, where the employee has little control over the conditions.)
- Poorly maintained walkways or broken equipment
- Inadequate staffing levels, leading to single-person lifts and greater chance of falls
- Inadequate lighting

### Workplace prevention

The source of slips, trips and falls are one of the easiest injury categories to isolate and prevent reoccurrence. A review of current insurance claim records, OSHA logs and/or incident reports can provide valuable information as to where in the facility most falls are occurring. This serves as a starting point when evaluating for any needed controls. The five basic areas that must be evaluated for any successful prevention program are floor surface exposures, non-surface exposures, footwear, balance and employee behaviors.

## Floor surface exposures

- Are wet floor signs set down BEFORE mopping/waxing?
- Are wet floor signs removed promptly when the floor is dry?
- Is mop water regularly refreshed with clean water and solution?
- Are mop heads frequently changed and adequately cleaned on a regular basis?
- Is mopping/waxing performed during low traffic times?
- Is the practice of mopping half a hall at a time performed?
- Are employees instructed to monitor the floors until they are dry?
- Is the proper floor cleaner used and diluted according to manufacturer's instructions?
- Are floor degreasers used in areas prone to grease buildup (food service prep areas)?
- Is drainage in food preparation areas and shower rooms adequate and working?
- Have broken tiles, broken stairs or loose carpeting been replaced/repaired?
- Are dish rooms, coolers/freezers, shower rooms, entries, stairs, ramps, etc. of a slip-resistant surface?
- Are skid-resistant rugs placed in entry areas during wet weather conditions to allow those entering to dry off the bottoms of footwear?
- Have high-risk areas (stairs, ramps, grounds, parking, high traffic areas, dining rooms, loading docks, construction areas) been inspected/evaluated for unsafe conditions as part of the safety rounds inspections?
- Have specialized slip/trip/fall evaluations been performed in those areas of particular concern or injury frequency?

## Non-floor surface exposures

- Are handrails and guardrails secured?
- Are fixed stairs and railings constructed to recognized safety standards?
- Are chains, guardrails and warning signs in place around elevated areas?
- Are aisle ways and stairs free of obstacles, including cords and stored items?
- Is lighting adequate?
- Are cabinet doors/drawers kept closed when not in use?
- Are ladders inspected and taken out of commission when found to have damaged rungs or floor anchors?
- Are proper ladders used for the specific task?
- Are adequate devices available for employee use to move materials so they are not manually attempting to carry large quantities of items at one time, limiting their vision or causing imbalance?
- In cramped working areas, is there equipment available to make lifting/handling less awkward?
- Are permanent aisle ways and passageways marked, where appropriate?

## Footwear

The wearing of proper footwear can reduce the slips and falls by as much as 40-50 percent.

- Are employees discouraged from wearing open-toed, high-heeled shoes?
- Are employees encouraged or required to wear shoes with non-slip soles?
- Have employees been trained on the importance of keeping shoe soles clean for better traction?

## Balance

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that older adults are 33 percent more likely to fall in any one year. As one ages, vision, fitness level, equilibrium and alertness may also decline. Unfortunately, physical fitness balance is the responsibility of the individual, and the employer is limited in how to respond.

Employers can only encourage employees to maintain a physically fit and able body condition in order to meet the requirements of the job.

- Are employees encouraged to get their vision tested regularly and use corrective eyewear?
- Are employees encouraged to maintain normal weight and strong flexible muscles?
- Are employees encouraged to promptly address problems with the inner ear, alcohol, over-the-counter and Rx drugs, increased stress and inadequate rest?

## Behaviors

Most injuries, including slips, trips and falls, are a result of "unsafe actions" not "unsafe conditions." It is important both employees and management be accountable regarding elimination of unsafe behaviors in the workplace.

- Is there a policy of noncompliance toward unsafe behaviors that may lead to injury, including horseplay?
- Are employees prohibited from climbing on shelving, chairs and desks?
- Is management trained to recognize employees who appear unduly stressed or unfocused?
- Is there a procedure to report and correct slip, trip and fall hazards?
- Are routine inspections of ladders, stairs, walking and working surfaces performed and documented? (This should include indoor and outdoor areas.)
- Is there consistent use of the disciplinary policies when unsafe behavior is observed?
- Are employees discouraged from taking undue haste or shortcuts?
- Are staffing levels adequate to deal with the workload?
- Are employees held accountable for cleaning up spilled liquids or reporting immediately?
- If a patient falls during the patient-transfer process, have employees been trained on how to fall "with the patient safely" if the fall is inevitable?

## Summary

The key to preventing slips, trips and falls in the healthcare industry is to evaluate five areas - floor surface exposures, non-surface exposures, footwear, balance and employee behaviors. Successful control of the hazards associated with these exposures will result in a safer work atmosphere and injury frequency and severity reduction.

## References

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2. "Guard Against Slips and Trips ..." [National Safety Council](#). Online March 2006
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