



*A Safety Module:*

# PERSONAL SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

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*Developing Top-Notch CNAs, One Inservice at a Time*

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*A Safety Module:*

## Personal Safety in the Workplace

### WORKPLACE INJURIES ON THE RISE

Health care workers face a wide range of safety hazards on the job, including:

- **Biological Hazards** (bodily fluids with infectious agents).
- **Chemical Hazards** (cleaning supplies, latex allergies).
- **Physical Hazards** (falls and back injuries).
- **Psychosocial Hazards** (violence and sexual harassment).
- **Environmental Emergencies** (fires and natural disasters).

Preventing or reducing health care workers' exposure to these hazards is possible. But, did you know that health care workers have actually begun to experience **MORE** occupational injuries and illnesses over the past decade?

Biological hazards pose the greatest risk for healthcare workers. About **800,000 healthcare workers** are exposed to a biological hazard each year in the United States.

Chemical hazards are the second biggest threat to healthcare workers. A recent study found at **least 24 healthcare related hazardous chemicals** in healthcare workers' bodies, all associated with chronic illness.

Physical hazards are the third greatest risk to healthcare workers. Every single day in the United States, 9000 healthcare workers sustain a **disabling injury** while performing work-related tasks.

The fourth greatest risk to healthcare workers is workplace violence and sexual harassment. Healthcare workers are the victim of nearly **half** of all injuries caused by workplace violence. In fact, **nursing assistants** who work in long-term care have the **highest incidence** of workplace violence of all American workers.

Fire and building inspections, codes, and a well-trained staff decrease the risk of fire. However, a healthcare setting can be **deadly** if a fire occurs. Chemicals like oxygen and certain cleaners can turn a simple fire into an **explosion**. And, the need to evacuate frail or immobile clients increases your chance of becoming injured.

**Keep reading to learn more about these common workplace hazards and learn how to reduce your risk of injury!**



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# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR SAFETY?

## WHO KEEPS YOU SAFE AT WORK?

There are three main players involved in making sure you are safe at work:

- **OSHA** (Occupational Safety and Health Administration).
- Your **employer**.
- **YOU!**

In 1970, the Occupational Safety & Health Act was passed by Congress. This federal law requires a safe workplace for every American employee.

Businesses that fail to comply with OSHA regulations face fines of \$5,000 per day or more.

To comply with employee safety laws, your workplace must:

- Follow all OSHA standards.
- Educate employees about their right to be safe.
- Provide personal protective equipment to employees as appropriate.
- Work to constantly improve workplace safety.
- Plan for emergencies.
- Provide medical care for injured employees.

Safety is also the responsibility of **every employee**. After reading this inservice, come back to this page and sign the “**Pledge for Personal Safety**”. Once you sign it, cut it out and tape it up in your locker or workspace where you will see it every day. Start each day with a promise to yourself, your co-workers and your clients to keep yourself safe at work.

## PLEDGE FOR PERSONAL SAFETY

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
on this day \_\_\_\_\_  
make a pledge to myself, my co-workers and my clients to comply with the following safety guidelines along with any others taught to me by my employer that are considered critical in my particular working environment.

### Signing this contract means I will:

1. Use Standard Precautions with all my clients regardless of their diagnosis—even if they don't seem sick.
2. Read and follow the MSDS and the warning labels on any chemicals that I use.
3. Protect my back from injury by using proper lifting techniques and asking for help when moving or lifting heavy clients or objects.
4. Follow my workplace policy for handling sexual harassment and violent behaviors to put an end to the problem before the situation worsens.
5. Know the location of fire alarms and extinguishers and become trained in how to use them. And, learn the evacuation route and the evacuation procedure for my workplace.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

# WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read through this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your supervisor and co-workers!



## FOCUS ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Biological hazards are materials that can cause infection and disease in humans. Biohazards include:

- Blood and other body fluids, including droplets from sneezing or coughing, drainage from wounds, urine, feces and sweat.
- Client care equipment and/or personal belongings contaminated by blood or body fluids.
- Garbage contaminated by germs, including: discarded wound dressings, used needles and the contents of a bedpan, urinal or Foley catheter bag.

### A WORD ABOUT DRUG RESISTANT BACTERIA

Over the last decade, almost every type of bacteria has become stronger and less responsive to antibiotic treatment when it is really needed.

- MRSA is a “staph” infection that is resistant to antibiotics. People who are very sick, elderly or who have wounds are most at risk for MRSA. Staph germs can be found on the skin, in the nose, in blood and in urine and are spread by unwashed hands or dirty gloves.
- VRE is a drug resistant infection caused by germs that live in the intestines. It is spread by unwashed hands or dirty gloves.

### HOW DO YOU STAY SAFE?

Use **Standard Precautions** with **ALL** of your clients, no matter what their diagnosis—even if they don’t seem sick! Assume all blood, body fluids, secretions, open wounds, and mucous membranes contain a horrible germ that you can “catch”.

Standard precautions guidelines include:

- Washing your hands after you touch blood, body fluids or contaminated items—even if you were wearing gloves.
- Wearing gloves whenever you might have to touch blood, other body fluids or items contaminated by body fluids.
- Changing gloves in between clients.
- Wearing a mask, goggles and/or gown to protect your eyes, skin and clothing—whenever you think you might be splashed with a client’s blood or body fluid.

### WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

- Keep up to date on immunizations and get tested for TB.
- Wash your hands before, during and after client care.
- Tell your supervisor if you think a client may have an infection.
- Follow additional infection control precautions (like respiratory precautions) as necessary.



### HAND WASHING: IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK!

The single most important thing you can do to help control the spread of infection—including drug resistant diseases—is to **wash your hands!!**

- The key to washing your hands is *not* the kind of soap you use or the temperature of the water. It’s the 30-60 seconds of energy you put into scrubbing your hands. *Friction* gets rid of bacteria—not soap!

### A Word About Hand Sanitizers

Healthcare workers usually report that TIME is the biggest reason they don’t wash their hands as often as they should.

Waterless hand sanitizers eliminate this problem. Hand rubs are faster because you can rub your hands while moving between patients.

**To use:** Place a small amount in the palm of one hand. Rub hands together, being sure to cover all surfaces of hands and fingers. **Rub until hands are dry.**

**Only use waterless hand rubs when hands are not visibly soiled. If hands are visibly soiled always wash with soap and water.**



# FOCUS ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS—CONTINUED

## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Personal protective equipment—also known as PPE— is special clothing or equipment people wear to protect themselves against a hazard. This includes both chemical and biological hazards.
- Gloves are an example of personal protective equipment that you use every day. Other examples include goggles, shoe covers, CPR masks, surgical caps and gowns.
- Your supervisor is *required* to supply you with the personal protective equipment needed to do your job safely. It is *your* responsibility to use (and dispose of) the PPE properly.

## PROTECT YOUR HANDS AND FACE

- To protect your face from chemicals or body fluids, you may need to use safety glasses, goggles, a face shield or a mask.
- Make sure safety glasses and goggles fit you properly so that they don't slide down your nose.
- Clean and/or disinfect your eyewear and masks according to your workplace policy.
- Wearing gloves is the best protection for your hands. Latex gloves are most commonly used during client care.



## PROTECT YOUR LUNGS

- Keep in mind that disposable paper masks do not protect your lungs from harmful fumes, gases or germs. To be safe, you need a special respirator mask.
- If you work with clients who have active tuberculosis, you'll need to be fitted for a respirator mask to make sure it fits your face tightly.
- Be sure to put on your respirator *before* you enter the client's room. Leave it in place until *after* you leave the contaminated area.



**CONNECT**  
**It now!**

*Apply what you know*

### ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS

Additional precautions are guidelines for protecting yourself and your clients when more than just standard precautions are needed.

**Test your knowledge about additional precautions!**

#### 1. CONTACT PRECAUTIONS:

*What PPE is needed?*

*When is this used?*

#### 2. DROPLET PRECAUTIONS:

*What PPE is needed?*

*When is this used?*

#### 3. AIRBORNE PRECAUTIONS:

*What PPE is needed?*

*When is this used?*

**Ask your supervisor to check your answers!**

## FOCUS ON CHEMICAL HAZARDS

Health care employees use a number of items every day that contain potentially dangerous chemicals. These include:

- Adhesives
- Antiseptics
- Cleaning solvents
- Disinfectants
- Mercury
- Soaps & Detergents
- Medications
- Even common chemicals can explode, start on fire, irritate your skin or cause breathing problems.
- You have the right to be taught about chemical hazards in your workplace and how to protect yourself from them.
- Every item that contains chemicals must be labeled with the correct safety information.

### WHAT IS THE MSDS?

- An MSDS is a **M**aterial **S**afety **D**ata **S**heet. It contains information about the hazards of a chemical, how to use the product safely and what to do if there is an emergency with that chemical.
- You have the right to read the MSDS for any chemical used at your workplace. Be sure you know where these sheets are kept.
- By reading an MSDS, you'll find out many things, including whether a chemical is dangerous to breathe, if it can hurt your skin and whether it can start on fire.



### HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

- Read and follow the MSDS and the warning labels on any chemicals that you use.
- Don't mix chemicals or cleaning products together unless there is a policy for doing so.
- Be sure to let your supervisor know if the label on a chemical container becomes too dirty to read, gets torn or falls off . . . or if you need first aid because of a chemical.
- Remember that it's *your* job to ask questions if you have concerns about chemical hazards in your workplace. It's *your supervisor's* job to answer any questions you may have.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Did you know there is an MSDS for latex gloves?** Latex is a natural chemical that comes from the sap of a rubber tree. The sap is heated with other chemicals and then poured into molds to create the gloves.

Latex contains certain **proteins** that cause allergic reactions. At least 10 different proteins have been linked to allergic reactions.

Other chemicals in gloves, known as **accelerators** and **antioxidants** may also cause allergic reactions.

Typical allergic reactions to latex include **itching, hives, swelling, and runny nose.**

More serious symptoms may involve **wheezing**, difficulty breathing, nausea, heart palpitations, decreased blood pressure and **anaphylactic shock.**

Latex allergies develop over time with repeated or prolonged exposure. So, while you may not have been allergic to latex in the past, there is a chance you could develop a latex allergy in the future.

**Ask your supervisor for latex free gloves if you experience a latex allergy.**



# FOCUS ON PHYSICAL HAZARDS

## FALLS AND BACK INJURIES

- It's not just clients who fall down. Employees do too! In fact, over 300,000 Americans are injured by a fall at work every year.
- Health care workers are at risk for sprains, strains and other back injuries due to frequent lifting, twisting and bending.
- In addition, back problems can be caused by poor posture or by sitting for too long.
- Eighty percent of all adults in the U.S. will have serious low back pain at least once in their lives. Most of these injuries could be prevented.
- Every year, American workers call in sick 93 million times due to back trouble.

## HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

### Avoid Falls

- Watch out for freshly washed or waxed floors. It's easy to slip on a wet surface.
- Wear rubber soled shoes while you are working. They provide the best traction.
- Practice safe walking skills and pay attention to where you are walking. Move slowly on smooth or slippery surfaces.
- Always pick up items that you drop (or that you see someone else drop).
- Watch out for loose electrical cords, throw rugs and other items that might cause you to trip.

### Avoid Back Injuries:

- Plan your moves before you try to lift or transfer a client.
- Ask for help with heavy loads.
- Lift with your legs. . .not your back.
- Bend at the knees, not the waist.
- Avoid *twisting* at the waist during a client transfer.
- Use smooth, steady movements during a lift or transfer.
- Seek help before a back injury becomes severe or chronic. Your supervisor may be able to help you find new ways to perform your work that don't injure your body.



# THE NEXT STEP!

*Apply what you've learned!*

Did you know that CNAs are three and a half times more likely than the average worker to miss work because of a work related injury.

***The rate of injury in nurse aides is similar to that of construction workers!***

Each year there are an estimated **67,000** back injuries among health care workers nationally.

**What do YOU do to prevent a back injury in your daily routine?**

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**What do you do that may put you at risk for injury** (*move heavy clients without help, twist during client care*)?

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**What will you do differently after reading this inservice? Why?**

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## FOCUS ON PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment includes a number of different behaviors, all of which are unacceptable. For example:

- A supervisor offers extra vacation or a promotion to an employee in return for sexual favors.
- Someone's constant foul language makes an employee's work life miserable.
- A supervisor keeps asking an employee for a date even after the employee has said no several times.
- An employee whistles at a coworker and makes frequent comments about her body.
- A client's family member keeps trying to touch a staff member in inappropriate ways.

### HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

- If you feel you are being harassed, speak up! Let the person know you are offended by his or her actions.
- If the behavior doesn't stop, let your supervisor (or another person in management) know right away.
- Follow your workplace policies and procedures for dealing with sexual harassment.
- If the behavior *still* continues, consider filing a formal complaint with your state's Department of Labor.

### KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Your supervisor is responsible for making sure that sexual harassment is not tolerated. If you go to your supervisor with a harassment complaint, you can expect him or her to:

- Listen to what you have to say.
- Initiate an investigation in a timely manner.
- Keep your complaint confidential and private.
- Take action to correct the problem, even if it means firing the offender.
- Refuse to allow either party to take "revenge" because of the complaint.



### *Thinking outside the box!*

*Working with clients in the home often requires coming up with creative solutions to uncommon problems.*

- **THE PROBLEM:** You are caring for a 78 year old man who is very ill, yet still has the strength to reach out and touch you inappropriately during routine care.
- **WHAT YOU KNOW:** You report the behavior to your supervisor but are told that he is just a harmless old man who would never hurt you.
- You agree that he is harmless but you are still uncomfortable with being touched this way.
- **GET CREATIVE:** Think of **3 creative solutions** you might try to get your client to stop this behavior. If the behavior continues . . . at what point would you consider refusing to care for this client? What would lead you to file a formal complaint?
- **TALK ABOUT IT:** Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve the problem.



## FOCUS ON PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS—CONTINUED

### VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

More physical assaults happen in health care facilities than in any other type of workplace.

- Health care workers are at risk for violent behavior from coworkers, family members and strangers. However, the *biggest* risk of violence comes from aggressive clients.

#### **Some signs that a client may become violent include:**

- Yelling, swearing and making threats.
- Looking flushed and tense, with clenched fists.
- Speaking or breathing too fast.
- Glaring intensely.
- Standing too close to others.
- Pacing or stamping their feet.
- Throwing objects.

### HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

- Keep calm. If you get upset, the violent person may become more agitated.
- Stand at least an arm's length away from an aggressive person.
- Avoid letting the person trap you in a corner or block your exit from the room.
- Try to get the person to sit down.
- If you feel scared for your safety, leave the room and contact your supervisor!
- You may need to "buddy up" with another employee to provide care to clients who are known to be aggressive.
- Don't wear jewelry—especially necklaces—to reduce your risk of being strangled during a violent situation.
- Avoid touching angry clients unless you know from past experience that touching them is safe.
- Be a good role model. If you get angry or aggressive because of a client's violence, it will only make the situation worse.
- Make sure you know your workplace policy for getting help if a client becomes violent.



# THINK about it!

### UNINTENTIONAL HARM

Not all violence in the health care workplace is done with criminal intent.

Sometimes, clients with dementia or Alzheimer's Disease (AD) can become violent and harm a nurse or aide without intending to cause harm. . . it's just a symptom of the disease.

When caring for clients with dementia or AD who become violent, the best defense is a good offense!

There are ways you can protect yourself from physical harm while maintaining the rights and dignity of the client.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Block blows but never hit back.
- Duck, bob and weave.
- Stay out of reach.
- Take a buddy with you.

***Do you have any other tactics for dealing with these types of clients?***

***Share your experiences and ideas with your co-workers and find out how they handle these situations.***

## FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

### WORKPLACE FIRES

Most fires are *preventable*. Here are some ways that you can help prevent fires in your workplace:

- Make sure that clients and coworkers who smoke follow your workplace smoking rules.
- Never allow clients to smoke in bed.
- Don't let anyone smoke in areas where oxygen is in use.
- Report any equipment that has cracked or frayed electrical cords.
- Turn off electrical appliances when you are finished using them.
- Keep things that can catch on fire (paper, curtains, linens, etc.) away from hot devices such as stoves, radiators or reading lamps.

### HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

- Know the location of any fire alarms. Make sure you can use them—even in the dark.
- Know where fire extinguishers are located and learn how to use them.
- Be sure you know how to escape from your workplace—whether you work in a facility or a client's home.
- Know which clients need help during a fire.
- Make sure you know where to meet your coworkers outside the building so that "heads" may be counted.
- Participate in regular fire drills at your workplace.

### If a fire breaks out in your workplace, just remember R.A.C.E.:

- **R**escue. Move clients away from smoke and flames first. (Both are deadly!)
- **A**larm. Follow your workplace policy for reporting a fire. Usually, this means pulling an alarm or making a phone call.
- **C**onfine. Close the door of any empty rooms to slow the spread of smoke and flame.
- **E**xtinguish. Try to put the fire out . . . but only if it is small (like in a wastebasket or a frying pan).

### NATURAL DISASTERS

- Hurricanes usually strike *slowly*. You'll probably have time to prepare yourself and your clients for this disaster.
- Tornadoes usually strike *suddenly*, with little warning. A *tornado watch* means that a tornado is possible and that you need to stay alert. A *tornado warning* means that a tornado has actually been sighted and that you need to protect yourself and your clients immediately.
- Earthquakes can happen without warning, but floods can usually be predicted.
- Be sure you know which types of natural disasters are common in your area so that you can be ready for them.

### HOW CAN YOU STAY SAFE?

- Every workplace is required by law to have an emergency preparedness plan to cover a variety of emergencies.
  - For health care organizations, this plan must teach you:
    - To know when the plan is being put into place.
    - Who does what during an emergency.
    - How to evacuate a facility or client's homes, if necessary.
    - Where clients can go if your facility or their homes are destroyed.
    - How to help clients during an emergency.
- If you have a four-wheel drive vehicle, you may be asked to transport coworkers during an emergency.
- Your workplace may have a "telephone tree". A coworker may call you to tell you that the emergency plan has been implemented. Then, you might be expected to call the next person on the list.
- You probably learned about the emergency plan for your workplace during orientation. However, it's a good idea to review the plan every year.



## FOCUS ON SAFETY IN THE COMMUNITY

Many nursing assistants work in the community. They go from one client's home to another, sometimes traveling in the dark. This requires some additional safety precautions:

- Get specific, clear directions to each client's home—before you leave your office.
- Make sure your supervisor knows your visit schedule. If your schedule changes for some reason, call the office right away.
- If you drive to clients' homes, make sure your car is in good working order. Keep the gas tank at least half full and check your oil and tires frequently.
- Make sure you have a street map in your car in case you get lost. Keep change for a phone call, too.
- Drive with your car doors locked.
- Keep a blanket in your car during the winter and a bottled water in the summer. Keep a snack in the car, too.
- Park as close as possible to the client's home and walk directly to the client's door.
- Never leave your purse visible in your car. (Lock it in the trunk.)
- Look around before you leave your car. Don't get out of the car if you feel unsafe.
- Attach a whistle or chemical spray to your key ring. Keep your keys ready—in your hand—while walking to and from your car.
- If a loose dog threatens you, back away slowly. Never run or the dog may chase you!
- Always knock on the door before entering a client's home.
- Wear your name tag so people know you are there to help.
- If your client has relatives or neighbors who create a safety problem, discuss the issue with your supervisor.
- If you are the victim of a robbery, don't resist giving up your money or valuables. They are not worth getting hurt over!
- Tell coworkers about any safety issues you've encountered at a specific client's home.
- If a client's home feels unsafe to you, ask your supervisor to send another aide with you or plan your visit to overlap with the visit of a nurse or therapist.



## 5 KEY points

### *Key Points to Remember*

1. Health care workers face a wide range of safety hazards on the job, including: biological, chemical, physical, psychosocial and environmental hazards.
2. Keeping you safe at work is a team effort between OSHA, your employer and YOU!
3. Stay safe from biological hazards by using Standard Precautions with ALL of your clients, no matter what their diagnosis—even if they don't seem sick!
4. Protect your back from injuries by following safe lifting or "no lift" guidelines promoted by your employer.
5. Know the locations of fire alarms and fire extinguishers in your workplace . . . and get trained on how to use them!

***Safety is as simple as ABC:***

**ALWAYS**

**BE**

**CAREFUL!**

## FINAL THOUGHTS: WORKPLACE SAFETY Q & A

**Q:What if I’m trapped by a fire and can’t get out by the regular escape route?**

A: Go to a room with a window and close the door. Stuff clothing or linens under and around the door to block out the smoke. Next, break a window. Stay close to the bottom of the window since that’s where fresh air will come in. Wave a shirt or pillowcase outside so someone can see you. Stay calm until help arrives.

**Q:How should I respond to a bomb threat?**

A: All bomb threats should be taken seriously. Be sure to report any threat that you receive. In addition, tell your supervisor if you find something in your workplace that looks suspicious. (But, *don’t* touch it!)

**Q:Why are there more assaults in the health care industry than in any other?**

A: Health care workers often deal with people who are under stress. Some of their clients have mental as well as physical illnesses. Health care workers also find themselves alone in a room with a client or family member. And, the public can usually enter a health care facility—day or night—without being questioned.

**Q:Is it possible for me to pick up an infection from the equipment I use at work?**

A: Yes, it is possible! Items like thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, bed pans, walkers and wheelchairs can all spread germs if they’re not cleaned properly—or if you don’t wash your hands after touching them. Be sure to throw away disposable client care items after using them. If items are meant to be used again, make sure they are cleaned according to your workplace policy.

**Q:What should I do if I see a coworker fall down?**

A: Follow the basic first aid procedure for falls. First, check to see if your coworker is conscious. If not, look for life-threatening problems such as no signs of breathing, no pulse or severe bleeding. Check for signs of broken bones. Then, get help! Later, be sure to document what you witnessed. Your report may help make your workplace safer.



# WHAT I KNOW NOW!

*Now that you’ve read this inservice on personal safety, take a moment to jot down a couple of things you learned that you didn’t know before.*

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