

10 Hospital Slip and Fall Risk Factors

Identifying the specific slip, trip and fall hazards that hospital workers face

Hospitals are high-risk workplaces. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the incidence rate of lost-workday injuries from slips, trips, and fall (STR) accidents on the same level in hospitals is 38.2 per 10,000 employees, 90 percent greater than the average rate for all other private industries combined (which is 20.1 per 10,000 employees)ⁱ.



It's not only doctors, nurses, and medical personnel who face these risks; hospitals also employ maintenance staff, medical technicians, building and grounds staff, food service workers, laundry, housekeeping, and administrative personnel.

We've identified 10 slip hazards that hospital workers will likely encounter in this most challenging of work environments:

1 Contaminated Floors

Wet floors, including floors contaminated with water, grease or food, are the most common cause of slip, trip and fall claims, according to the CDC. In a hospital environment, a host of other contaminants potentially come into play. In addition to being a slip hazard, continually wet surfaces promote the growth of mold, fungi, and bacteria that can cause infections. Keep floors dry and properly cleaned, and make it a policy to deal with spills immediately.

2 Improper Footwear

Hospital workers need the right shoes to stay safe. Slip and fall incidents are dramatically reduced when employers mandate the use of slip-resistant safety footwear in the workplace. Wearing water-resistant, slip-resistant work shoes has been proven to decrease the likelihood of slip and fall accidents.

3 Lack of Signage

It's vital to alert employees and visitors to be careful and avoid contaminated, wet, or otherwise dangerous areas. Prevent entry into wet or slippery floor areas with highly visible warning signs—including barrier devices, placards or cones to redirect foot traffic—and always remove the signage once the area is safe and dry.

4 Ineffective Floor Mats & Runners

Mats are only effective if properly used and maintained. Old or poorly placed mats can make your slip, trip, and fall problem even worse. Only use well-constructed commercial safety mats with a slip-resistant, high-traction rubber base that grips the floor and also provides traction on the surface. Place mats down on a clean, dry surface.

5 Stairs and Landings

Falling on stairs can result in some of the most serious slip and fall injuries, depending upon how steep or shallow the steps are. Make sure the area is well lit, and instruct workers to use the handrail when using stairs, to avoid rushing, and to be mindful of where they're headed.

6 Incorrect Housekeeping Protocols

Untrained hospital cleaning crews can do as much harm as good by using improper cleaning methods or cleaning solutions that leave floors wet, slick or slippery instead of clean and dry. Optimal floor cleaning procedures may help prevent slips and falls—for example, using no-skid waxes and cleaners, dry mopping following a wet mopping, etc. It's the employer's responsibility to make sure that every cleaner is properly trained.

7 Clutter, Cords and Obstructions

Cluttered and crowded walkways and hallways are tripping hazards in any workplace, and hospitals have even more movable equipment and potential obstructions than most. Aisles and passageways should be sufficiently wide for easy movement and should be kept clear. Access to exits must remain clear of obstructions at all times. Temporary electrical cords that cross aisles should be taped or anchored to the floor. Use retractable cords whenever possible.

8 Uneven Walking Surfaces

Though efforts should be made to install even, non-slip flooring or to treat existing floors with gritty, non-skid coatings, this is not always possible. Older buildings often have flooring that's damaged, warped or buckled, with irregular surfaces or unexpected slopes, level changes or surface changes. (For example, walking from a carpeted floor to a tile floor can cause a pedestrian to trip.) If eliminating uneven surfaces is not feasible, these hazardous areas should be emphasized with signage or by painting levels in a contrasting color to differentiate.

9 Inadequate Lighting

Poor visibility leads to accidents. Dim lighting keeps workers from fully seeing their surroundings and recognizing unsafe conditions in time to avoid them. Install more light fixtures in poorly lit areas. Verify light bulbs have an appropriate brightness and make sure they're checked and replaced on a regular basis. Install fixtures that emit light from all sides.

10 Food Service Areas & Restrooms

Sections of the hospital where food is prepared and served, as well as restroom facilities, are also considered high-risk areas. Wherever water, food or beverages can drip or spill onto the floor—kitchens, cafeterias, buffet lines, ice machines, freezers, dishwashers, sinks, soap dispensers, drinking fountains—should be given extra attention when formulating a slip-and-fall risk reducing plan.

To keep the workforce safe, hospitals and all employers are required to comply with OSHA regulations designed to eliminate these slip, trip and fall hazards. Being aware of these major risk factors is a step in the right direction. Review your company's comprehensive safety plan and make sure you've covered all the bases.

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