

Home Healthcare Workers Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Home healthcare is one of the fastest growing healthcare industries in the United States. Home health workers are employed in patient's homes, group homes, and assisted living facilities. Working inside a patient's home is different from working in a healthcare facility so it's important to ensure your Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) is flexible, comprehensive, and protects your employees from hazards and injuries that can occur on the job.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

HAZARDS IN HOME HEALTHCARE

Home healthcare workers have little control over their work environment which may contain a number of safety and health hazards. These hazards include bloodborne pathogens and biological hazards, latex sensitivity, ergonomic hazards from patient lifting, violence, hostile animals, and unhygienic and dangerous conditions.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

1. Getting to and from work safely

If you are driving to work, make sure your vehicle is in good working order and keep emergency supplies on hand. While travelling, keep your car locked and stay on well-traveled roads. Park in well-light areas and avoid underground parking lots, dark alleys, or parking next to large vehicles.

2. Slips and falls.

Indoor hazards include:

- Uneven or slippery floors
- Wrinkled or worn carpets and curling vinyl.
- Clutter in rooms, hallways, and stairs
- Lack of handrails on stairs
- Electrical cords on floors or that cross walkways
- Open drawers

While working indoors, keep your shoes on if allowed by the client and be sure to check the floor surface before walking on it. Watch out for clutter and suggest to the client that items be stored properly, electrical cords get tucked out of the way, and drawers stay closed. Always use handrails when going up and down stairs.

Outdoor hazards include:

- Slippery surfaces, such as sidewalks, steps and wooden ramps covered with water, ice, snow, leaves or moss.
- Uneven or damaged sidewalks and driveways
- Debris or items left on walkways.
- Poor lighting

3. Violence prevention in the home

Violence refers to any physical force that may cause injury, as well as threatening statements or behavior. Clients and their family members or visitors may become violent or argumentative due to frustration caused by the client's condition. Clients may also be experiencing difficulties due to trouble communicating, effects from medication, physical or cognitive limitations or frustration over being dependent on others.

4. Overexertion and repetitive motion – risk factors due to repetitive motion.

- Force
- Repetition
- Awkward postures
- Static postures
- Contact stress

Signs of overexertion and strain from repetitive movements include:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Loss of normal joint movement
- Shooting, dull, sharp, or aching pain
- Tenderness
- Weakness
- Pins and needles
- Hot or cold sensations

OTHER HIGH RISKS

Transferring or repositioning clients

The best way to avoid injury when transferring or repositioning clients is to use equipment and transfer assist devices, such as lifts or low-friction slide sheets.

If you have to lift manually, it's important to practice safe patient handling. Lift from a position of power by keeping your head up. Get close to the client while lifting and make sure you have a good hold. Use a staggered stance by positioning one foot in front of the other.

Dressing and bathing clients

When dressing a client, try to avoid awkward positions, such as reaching to dress the client, and static postures, such as supporting the client in one position for a long time. Keep your body upright and shift your weight with your legs when helping the client move.

When bathing a client, avoid awkward and static positions, using the same set of muscles repeatedly without a chance to rest and contact stress from kneeling on the floor or leaning against the tub.

Housekeeping hazards

When making beds, avoid bending at the back and flexing your knees as you make the

bed. Walk around the bed instead of reaching over it. If you have to work from one side, keep one hand on the bed for support.

While cleaning, use equipment with long handles for hard-to-reach areas, place a folded towel under your knees while kneeling and make sure protective gloves fit well to prevent using extra force with gripping.

BEST HOME HEALTHCARE PRACTICES

Classroom and practical training on patient handling policies and techniques, ergonomics, and body mechanics help ensure that healthcare workers know how to lift and handle patients properly. Training is also necessary for the various lifting devices used at the worksite. Some hospitals report that workers do not use available lift-assist devices due to set-up times, etc.

FINAL WORD

Due to an aging population and the high cost of hospital visits, there has been increased need for alternative care options for the sick, elderly or disabled. One of these solutions is the use of home health care.

For home health care workers, there is very little control over hazards they are exposed to. They face many unique safety risks while on the job.