



Slippery Floors

What comes to mind when you think of safety hazards in a health care facility? Bloodborne pathogens? Heavy lifting? Toxic chemicals?

Your list should also include wet and slippery floors. Many health care workers, as well as patients and visitors, are injured by slips, trips, and falls. And wet, slippery floors are often the culprit.

These accidents cause more than bumps and bruises, too. There's a real risk of broken or fractured bones, torn ligaments, or badly strained or sprained muscles. As we know, the broken bones of our patients and visitors don't heal easily. And these injuries can be serious enough to cause lots of pain, lost work time, and high medical bills.

To prevent these injuries, we have to be aware of the wet floor hazards that exist throughout our facility. Let's look at a few examples:

- ✦ Operating suites and patient treatment room floors get very slippery if blood or other body fluids spill.
- ✦ Blood and body fluids, including bedpan spills, can also end up on the floor of patients' rooms and bathrooms. Other risks in patients' rooms include spilled drinks, bath water, or even water from flower vases.
- ✦ Pharmacies and labs use a variety of liquids to do their work. Any of them, even water, are slip hazards if they end up on the floor.
- ✦ Laundry room floors are often wet.
- ✦ In food service areas, there's a risk of liquid spills while you prepare and serve food and clean up dishes and pans.
- ✦ Maintenance and supply areas are also filled with spill potential. Liquids like cleaning solutions, lubricating oils, and chemicals may be fire or health hazards as well as spill hazards.
- ✦ Hallways, visitor lounges, offices, and similar areas also have spill hazards. People may drip rain or snow when they come in from outdoors. Coffee or other beverages may spill.

Housekeeping chores are the most common cause of slippery floor hazards.

Everyone in the facility should take special care when floors are being cleaned or polished. We try to reduce the hazards by using nonslip cleaners and polishers, doing floor work at low-traffic hours, and blocking off and using signs to announce wet floors and stairs. But those precautions won't prevent accidents unless you pay attention.

Housekeeping poses other slip hazards as well. We should also be on the lookout for spills of cleaning solution or poorly bagged wet trash.

Prevent Slips, Trips, and Falls

Whatever the reason for hazards, we all have to take responsibility for preventing accidents. There are several rules we should all follow:

- ✦ **Avoid spills.** Cover containers of all liquids, even water or coffee. If a container such as a pail can't be covered, don't fill it to the top. That way, the liquid is less likely to slosh over.
- ✦ **Clean up all spills immediately.** You probably can't prevent all spills, but you can make sure they don't cause accidents. If the spill involves a chemical, a body fluid, or other potential hazard, cleanup should be left to a trained response team. You may be able to clean up small, non-hazardous spills yourself.
- ✦ **Use warning signs** where housekeeping is working and where water tends to collect (public entrance in winter). Staff should also make verbal warnings ("Watch your step, sir").

Don't forget to wear PPE if you're cleaning up a hazardous substance. And no matter what was spilled, block off the area during cleanup and dispose of waste properly.

- ✦ **Wear the right shoes.** Shoes with smooth leather soles are a slip and fall hazard. Wear shoes with nonskid soles at all times.
- ✦ **Walk, don't run.** It won't slow you down much and it will certainly help keep you (and anyone you run into) from slipping and falling.
- ✦ **Watch where you're going.** It's the most effective way to prevent slips, trips, and falls. Give the floor at least a little attention. Then you'll have time to go around any wet spots, uneven surfaces, or objects in your path. By the way, you should report these problems so they can be fixed before they harm someone.