

THE ADVISOR

MONTHLY COMPLIANCE COMMUNICATOR

HIPAA Compliance Tips During the Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time for celebration, joy, and spreading goodwill. However, for those working in healthcare, it's also necessary to remain cautious about protecting sensitive patient information. As festivities begin and work environments shift, here are some key tips to uphold HIPAA compliance during this joyous time.

- **Enhance Staff Training:** Offer refresher courses or workshops specifically tailored for the holiday season. Emphasize the importance of safeguarding patient data, especially during office parties or gatherings where discussions might inadvertently touch upon patient information.
- **Secure Remote Access:** With many professionals working remotely or accessing data from various locations during the holidays, ensure secure access to patient records. Encourage the use of encrypted connections and multifactor authentication for accessing sensitive information from outside the workplace.
- **Limit Personal Devices Usage:** Advise employees to limit the use of personal devices during the holidays for work-related tasks, especially when handling patient information. If unavoidable, make certain these devices comply with security protocols, such as updated antivirus software and secure connections.
- **Mindful Communication:** During gatherings or social events, remind employees to be cautious about discussing work-related matters, especially patient details, outside of designated secure environments. Stress the importance of maintaining confidentiality even during casual conversations.
- **Secure Physical Documents:** With increased holiday traffic in workplaces, it's important to secure physical documents containing patient information. Implement measures such as locking file cabinets and guaranteeing documents are not left unattended in public spaces.
- **Updated Policies:** Take this opportunity to review and update HIPAA policies and procedures, incorporating any recent changes in your organization's workflow or processes. Communicate these updates effectively to all staff members to ensure uniform compliance.

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- **Monitoring and Auditing:** Regularly monitor access logs and conduct internal audits to track any unusual activity related to patient information. This proactive approach helps in identifying and addressing potential security breaches promptly, especially during the holiday season when security threats such as phishing scams increase.

Remember, while the holiday season is a time for celebration, it's crucial to maintain HIPAA compliance and safeguard patient privacy. By implementing these tips and fostering a culture of awareness and responsibility among your staff, you can make sure that the festive spirit doesn't compromise the integrity of patient information. Wishing you a safe and compliant holiday season!

Extension Cord Safety.

The holidays and colder weather are here, and with that comes the increased use of extension cords. These can be used for connecting holiday decorations, lights, small devices, etc. to an electrical source. Extension cords are helpful tools that provide additional outlet space and power for devices or appliances. Caution should be taken when utilizing these useful pieces of equipment. When used improperly, extension cords can present many risks, including fire, shock, and tripping hazards.

All extension cords are not created equally. It is important to only use extension cords that are tested at a reputable laboratory, such as Intertek (ETL) or Underwriters Laboratories (UL). The lab information can typically be found on the product's packaging or the label on the cord. If you are unable to find the laboratory information in either of these locations, it would be beneficial to select a different brand of extension cord.

Here are some additional considerations to think about when it comes to your extension cord you're using:

- whether it's suitable for outdoor vs. indoor use
- cord length
- cord gauge or thickness
- cord wattage
- presence of grounding pin

All this information can be found on the cord's packaging. An indoor/outdoor use cord can be determined by the letters "W" and "S," where the "W" represents an outdoor-use cord and "S" represents an indoor-use cord. This is distinction because outdoor cords are wet-rated with protective insulation.

Cord length is often overlooked, and many are unaware that the shorter the cord, the more electrical current the cord is capable of sustaining. Knowing the wattage of the device you intend to plug in is helpful in the selection of the appropriate extension cord length.

Finally, the extension cord's gauge, or thickness, is in direct relation to the power output. The thicker the cord, the more amps the cord can manage.

An important safety feature that all extension cords should have is a grounding pin, or a third prong on the plug. If your extension cord does not have one, remove the cord from use. Never remove the grounding pin from a cord. Grounding pins help reduce potential electrical exposures if there are failures with internal wiring or a short circuit. It provides an emergency path for electrical current to travel.

Other safety considerations are:

- Throw away any frayed extension cord immediately.
- Do not plug extension cords into one another, or an extension cord train.
- Do not tape or staple extension cords to the floor or other surfaces.
- Do not place extension cords under rugs or furniture.
- If an extension cord feels hot to the touch, remove it from use immediately.

On another note, it is critical to never plug space heaters into an extension cord. Space heaters should always be plugged into a wall outlet. Using an extension cord for space heaters can cause the cord to overheat, resulting in a fire. Additionally, when a space heater is plugged into an outlet, do not plug any more devices into the same outlet. This can also cause a fire from the outlet overloading.

Extension cords are very helpful tools but must be used with caution. If safety measures are followed and respected, extension cords can be a useful tool to power necessary equipment and temporary devices. Read all the manufacturers' recommendations to select the appropriate cord for your needs and, above all, stay safe this holiday season!

It's Your Call

HIPAA: What are prevalent healthcare scams during the holiday season?

1. **Email Phishing:** Perpetrators adopt the personas of festive figures or reputable entities (e.g., charities) to entice recipients into clicking malicious links in emails. This tactic compromises personal data, including login credentials and credit card details. It is advised to verify authenticity by contacting the sender or IT support before interacting with any links.
2. **Impersonation Scams:** Typically delivered via text messages, these scams mimic trusted sources, urging recipients to buy gift cards and disclose the card numbers. Scammers may manipulate the sender's information to appear legitimate. To validate the request, it's crucial to communicate directly with the sender.
3. **Counterfeit Websites:** Scammers frequently establish fraudulent online stores during the holiday season, offering substantial discounts. Signs of suspicion include poor website quality, such as spelling errors or missing essential details like contact information and return policies. For enhanced security and protection of personal data, it is recommended to solely transact on reputable websites with 'HTTPS' in the URL.

OSHA: Our office has several stacked boxes in the storage room. Are there any OSHA rules about this?

OSHA has cited under the following regulations when stacked boxes have obstructed the means of egress, created a potential fire hazard, and posed a danger to employees.

- 1910.176 Secure storage. Storage of material shall not create a hazard. Bags, containers, bundles, etc., stored in tiers shall be stacked, blocked, interlocked and limited in height so that they are stable and secure against sliding or collapse. Housekeeping. Storage areas shall be kept free from accumulation of materials that constitute hazards from tripping, fire, explosion, or pest haborage.
- 1910.37 Danger to employees must be minimized. Exit routes must be free of explosives and highly flammable furnishings and decorations. Exit routes must be free and unobstructed.

Employers must assess the potential hazards and protect their workers appropriately.

Ensuring Medication Safety: Guide to Proper Handling of Single-Use vs Multi-Use Vials

A common error in healthcare facilities is the use of single-use vials of medications as multi-use vials. Healthcare workers must take the time to identify and become familiar with which vials of medicine are for single-use and which are multi-use to prevent using a single-use vial on multiple patients. The manufacturer labels the medicines as single-use or multi-use. Manufacturers' instructions for use should always be followed.

Single (dose) use vials are to be used on only one patient and discarded after that patient or procedure. The best practice standard is that single dose medications are encouraged to be used whenever possible to reduce the likelihood of contamination. Single-use vials do not typically contain antimicrobial preservatives and therefore can only be used once. They should not be left lying around after a patient to possibly be mistaken for multi-use vials. Single-use vials should never be used more than once.

Multi-dose vials typically contain an antimicrobial preservative to help prevent the growth of bacteria therefore making them safe to be used on multiple patients. The preservative has no effect on viruses and does not protect against contamination when healthcare personnel fail to follow safe injection practices and aseptic technique. When using multi-dose medications, aseptic techniques should be strictly followed, including proper hand hygiene.

Once a multi-dose vial has been opened or accessed, the vial should be dated and discarded within 28 days unless the manufacturer specifies a different date for the opened vial. If a vial has not been accessed and is unopened, it should be discarded according to the expiration date on the manufacturer's label. The manufacturer's expiration date refers to the shelf life of the medicine.

Both multi-dose and single-dose medications should be drawn up in a dedicated clean area away from possible contamination. The area should be away from a sink or other water sources to avoid contamination. The area should also be away from any area that is contaminated with blood or other body fluids, such as equipment. The area should be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis and anytime it is visibly soiled.

The medication vials should be accessed in an aseptic manner. The rubber septum of the vial should be cleaned with alcohol before it is pierced. A new needle and new syringe should be used each time a vial is accessed. Hand hygiene should always be performed when handling medicines, needles, and syringes.

From an infection control perspective, medications should be prepared as close as possible to the time it is administered to the patient. It is a safer practice to administer the medicine as soon as possible to prevent contamination of the medicine. The medicine may become physically or chemically unstable if drawn too far in advance. There is also a risk of contamination of the syringe and needle to air and dust if drawn in advance and stored in a drawer. Pre-filled syringes would be a better, safer practice to administer medicines rather than pre-drawing from a medicine vial.

Following these simple instructions will prevent error in utilizing vials of medicines and in pre-drawing medicines, therefore, keeping your patients safe. Whenever possible, use single-dose vials to minimize potential cross contamination and double-check the label prior to drawing up your medication. If you have any questions or would like further information, don't hesitate to contact TMC. We are here to help create a safer, more compliant environment for you, your staff, and your patients!

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Instructions

Print and post newsletter in office for staff review. Each member should sign this form when completed. Keep on file as proof of training on these topics.

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