

# THE ADVISOR

MONTHLY COMPLIANCE COMMUNICATOR

## Updated CDC Guidance for COVID-19 After Expiration of Public Health Emergency.

With the end of the federal COVID-19 public health emergency on May 11, 2023, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) updated its guidance relating to collecting public health data.

The CDC **updates** are as follows:

1. The CDC will no longer receive data to publish the Community Transmission levels of COVID-19. Healthcare facilities should check with local health departments on community activity.
2. The CDC **does** recommend source control based on individual circumstances (e.g., activity in the community). Source control is an important intervention during periods of higher respiratory virus transmission.

Source control is the use of respirators or well-fitting face masks or cloth masks that offer varying degrees of protection.

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## **Source control is recommended for individuals in healthcare settings who:**

1. Have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses.
2. Had close contact or higher-risk exposure with someone with COVID-19 for 10 days after exposure.

## **Source control is recommended, in general, in the following circumstances:**

1. Healthcare personnel who work in an area of the facility that has a higher outbreak of respiratory illness or is experiencing higher cases of COVID-19
2. Facility-wide source control should be implemented in areas that are higher risk (emergency dept., urgent care) periods of higher levels of community outbreaks.
3. Have source control recommended by public health authorities.

## **Takeaway for:**

**Patients, Visitors** entering a healthcare facility who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, or another respiratory illness should wear a mask.

**Healthcare Personnel** who work in an area of the facility with an outbreak of COVID-19 or other respiratory illness should wear a well-fitting facemask, or N95 respirator or higher. Healthcare facilities should monitor local health departments for information on COVID-19 in their communities to determine when broader use of source control is warranted.

3. CDC added an appendix to assist with how and when to implement broader use of source control.

## The CDC recommendations with **no changes**:

1. Visual alerts should be posted at the entrance of facilities.

## It's Your Call

**OSHA reflections:** Workplace violence directed toward healthcare workers has increased over the last few years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It has been attributed to dementia, delirium, drug and/or alcohol abuse and withdrawal, mental illness, trauma, facility location, and specific facility services. These findings and statistics have led OSHA to work toward rulemaking on a workplace violence standard for the healthcare industry.

OSHA has cited employers under the General Duty Clause when hazardous conditions or activities that cause, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm to employees have not been abated. Recent citations have seen penalties of more than \$15,000.

Suitable strategies to avert workplace violence include performing periodic assessments, soliciting employee feedback, implementing work practice and engineering controls, developing policies, training employees, and investigating incidents thoroughly.

## What is Code of Conduct and Why is it Important to My Healthcare Practice?

In healthcare, maintaining high ethical standards and responsible practices are paramount to providing quality care and preserving patient trust. To achieve these goals, a healthcare code of conduct (HCC) plays a pivotal role.

An HCC is a set of guidelines and principles that govern the behavior and actions of healthcare professionals – it serves as a moral compass that defines standards and expectations for those in the industry. It encompasses healthcare compliance, fraud prevention, ethics, adherence to rules and laws, and safeguarding patient information.

Healthcare compliance within an HCC maintains the integrity and legality of healthcare practices. In following compliance guidelines, healthcare professionals ensure that their practices are accountable and in line with legal and regulatory requirements. This includes regulations related to privacy, consent, documentation, and professional conduct. By complying with these rules and regulations, healthcare professionals contribute to a system that operates on accountability, patient safety, and prevention of misconduct.

Another focus of the HCC is the prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse. Healthcare fraud not only drains resources from the system but also compromises patient care. The HCC educates professionals about the various forms of fraudulent activities and emphasizes the importance of detecting, reporting, and preventing such practices. The code of conduct empowers healthcare professionals to uphold the highest ethical standards and protect the interests of patients and the healthcare system as a whole.

Ethics form the foundation of the HCC. Ethical behavior ensures that healthcare professionals act in the best interest of their patients, prioritize their well-being, and uphold principles such as autonomy, beneficence, and justice. High ethical standards help to safeguard interests of stakeholders and foster a culture of integrity, accountability, and trust.

Ensuring the security and confidentiality of patient health information (PHI) is a vital aspect of the HCC. HIPAA privacy law covers how to handle PHI legally and confidentially. The code provides guidelines on data protection, proper documentation, and the use of technology to safeguard patient information from unauthorized access or breaches.

To equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary for ethical and responsible practices in healthcare, our HCC online course was developed. This course covers compliance, fraud and abuse prevention, ethics, rules and laws, and PHI protection. It provides in-depth training, case studies, and practical examples to enhance understanding and facilitate implementation. Understanding and implementing the principles outlined in the code of conduct is crucial for providing high-quality care, maintaining patient trust, and upholding the integrity of the healthcare industry. If you would like to learn more, check out our online course for your practice.

# Keeping Your Practice Compliant: Understanding OSHA Sprinkler Violations

Safety is non-negotiable in healthcare practices. To establish a safe environment for our patients and staff, we must pay attention to every detail, including the sprinkler systems on our premises. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards apply not only to clinical procedures but also to aspects of physical safety, such as fire safety. It's essential to understand OSHA sprinkler system regulations and common violations to ensure your practice remains compliant.

## **Sprinkler Systems' Purpose**

Sprinkler systems are vital for preventing fire-related accidents and fatalities. They control fire spread, reduce heat and smoke damage, and can extinguish fires before firefighters arrive. According to OSHA, every establishment, including medical and dental practices, must have adequate fire protection systems in place.

## **Common OSHA Sprinkler Violations**

Sprinkler system violations occur when establishments do not comply with the fire protection standards set by OSHA. It's critical to follow OSHA fire safety standards to ensure the safety of your practice's staff and patients and to avoid fines and legal repercussions. Here are some common OSHA sprinkler violations:

- **Blocked Sprinkler Heads:** Objects should not obstruct sprinkler heads, as this can prevent them from functioning correctly during a fire. OSHA regulations specify that materials should not be stored within 18 inches (45.7 cm) of a sprinkler head. Examples of this can include stacking boxes too high in a storage room or hanging décor from the ceiling.
- **Insufficient Maintenance and Inspections:** OSHA requires sprinkler systems to be inspected and tested regularly. This entails checking the control valves, alarm devices, hydraulic nameplates, and the system's overall condition.
- **Improper Sprinkler System for the Building:** Different types of buildings and environments require specific types of sprinkler systems. For example, an area with electronic equipment might need a gaseous fire suppression system instead of water-based sprinklers.

## How to Avoid OSHA Sprinkler Violations

Avoiding OSHA sprinkler violations isn't just about following regulations; it's about maintaining a safe environment for everyone in your practice. Here's how you can stay compliant:

- **Regular Inspections:** Schedule regular inspections and maintenance for your sprinkler systems. Ensure control valves are open, alarm devices are functional, and there are no visible signs of damage, system blockage, or corrosion on the system.
- **Education and Training:** Make sure your staff understands the importance of keeping sprinkler heads unblocked and the regulations regarding storage in proximity to these devices. Awareness is a critical component of safety.
- **Consult with Experts:** Regarding fire safety, it's always a good idea to consult with professionals, like Total Medical Compliance. They can help guide you in meeting OSHA regulations.

## Why It Matters

Safety in a healthcare environment extends beyond medical procedures and involves every aspect of your practice. OSHA regulations exist to protect staff and patients alike and ensuring compliance reflects your practice's commitment to their well-being.

By understanding OSHA sprinkler violations and how to avoid them, you're taking an essential step toward a safer, more compliant healthcare practice. It might seem like a small detail, but it can make a significant difference when it matters most.

If you're unsure about your practice's compliance with OSHA regulations or need help navigating these guidelines, don't hesitate to reach out for professional guidance. At [Total Medical Compliance](#), we specialize in OSHA and HIPAA compliance for medical and dental practices.

Our team of experts will ensure that your fire safety measures, including your sprinkler systems, align with OSHA standards. We believe in proactive, preventive measures to help you steer clear of costly violations and "shield" your practice against risks. In healthcare, safety matters every single day.

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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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