Manual: Hospital and Hospital Clinics
Chapter: Environment of Care EC
Topic: Staff Food and Drink in Patient Care Areas

Are food, drink, and personal items for staff members allowed in patient care and staff work areas, such as nurse stations, registration areas, etc?

Any examples are for illustrative purposes only.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogens regulation 1910.1030 states, "Eating, drinking, smoking, applying cosmetics or lip balm, and handling contact lenses are prohibited in work areas where there is a reasonable likelihood of occupational exposure" and "Food and drink shall not be kept in refrigerators, freezers, shelves, cabinets or on countertops or benchtops where blood or other potentially infectious materials are present". The Joint Commission expects organizations to follow applicable licensure requirements, laws

and regulations. This includes OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogen regulations.

Health care organizations retain the ability to define and establish safe eating areas for staff members. An evaluation will determine what work areas represent the risks for contamination to food and drinks. Based on this assessment, organizations can designate a safe space for staff to eat or drink.

For example, an organization may determine that a nurse or physician station or other location is physically separated from other work areas subject to contamination and therefore reasonable to anticipate that occupational exposure is not likely.

Keep in mind that while OSHA regulations apply to all health care facilities, local health departments may have additional requirements that health care organizations must comply with.

Additional Resources

OSHA 29 CFR 1910.1030 Bloodborne Pathogens

Perspectives Article (March 2019)

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