

# Safety Talk

## Slips, Trips, and Falls in Nursing Facilities

### Before you begin

Review your organization's injury records for the past five years, looking for slip, trip, and fall accidents. Survey the workspaces at your facility to identify areas with potential for these hazards.



### Introduction

There are many statistics about falls by residents living in nursing facilities, but did you know from 2015 through 2019, the second leading cause of accidents reported to BWC were related to falls by employees? There are many opportunities in the nursing environment that can lead to these types of accidents. You can avoid many falls by identifying and correcting the hazards before they lead to an injury.

### Definitions

**Fall hazard** means any condition on a walking-working surface that exposes an employee to a risk of harm from a fall on the same level or to a lower level.

**Lower level** means a surface or area to which an employee could fall. Surfaces or areas such as, ground levels, floors, roofs, ramps, runways, excavations, pits, tanks, materials, water, equipment, and similar surfaces and structures, or portions thereof.

**Walking-working surface** means any horizontal or vertical surface on or through which an employee walks, works, or gains access to a work area or workplace location.

## Discussion

Employees working in nursing facilities are exposed to slip, trip, and fall hazards every day. These hazards exist in the working environment and the environment is constantly changing.

There are different types of safety hazards that cause falls. Weather can cause wet, slippery surfaces or cracked and uneven ground. Repeated use of equipment and structures can cause them to wear down and lead to broken support rails and banisters and cracked flooring. Moving equipment can cause trip hazards that weren't there the day before. People don't clean up spilled fluids right away.

Can you name areas in and around the facility that could cause a slip, trip, or fall injury? Can you name a situation caused by employees that could set up a trip, slip, and fall? How can we make the environment free of hazards that cause slip accidents? The best answers include housekeeping, reporting issues right away, and a good preventative maintenance program.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to inspect, regularly and as necessary, and maintain in a safe condition all walking-working surfaces. This is to ensure you minimize slips, trips, and falls. But falls from the same level, e.g. on floors, are not the only types of falls that may occur in a nursing facility. Working at heights such as on ladders, step stools, or even the roof create hazards that may lead to falls. In conducting our inspections, we should focus on work areas most likely to have these hazards. These include kitchens, showers, laundry rooms, resident rooms, entries and exits, parking lots, and floor transitional areas such as walking from carpeted areas to tiled areas.

Kitchens and small serving rooms can have many hazards that can cause one to slip, trip, and fall. What are some common obstacles? (answers may include liquids on the floor, boxes on the floor, using a chair to retrieve items from a shelf.) Solutions to these issues include having supplies to wipe up spills readily available, putting items away and off the floor, and using a properly designed step stool, rated for employee use.

Showers can create a serious hazard. To keep from slipping in a shower, wear slip-resistant soles and wipe your feet on a small mat outside the shower. Inspect the mats to ensure they don't become frayed over time to prevent trips.

Workers use laundry areas and dirty utility rooms to rinse out soiled linen. These areas may have water spots on the floors that can be hazardous. Again, proper footwear, wiping the soles of shoes dry, and wiping up the wet floors will lower the risk of falling. Where floors remain wet, use caution signs.

Resident rooms pose hazards from spots of water and powder on the floors. Too many items to work around in a room may make it difficult to recognize potential dangers and cause tripping hazards. Proper footwear with good slip-resistant soles can help prevent slips. Housekeeping and putting items away immediately can prevent trips.

In addition, electrical, plumbing, building inspections involving climbing, snow removal, and general-maintenance tasks may expose a maintenance person to areas of concern. Regular inspections of maintenance area and equipment along with using safe working practices will reduce the chances of falling.

Ladder safety rules include selecting the correct type of ladder, inspecting the ladder prior to each use, using the three-point technique to climb up and down the ladder, never carry object while climbing the ladder and wearing proper footwear. Not overreaching while on the ladder and not standing on the top two steps of a ladder will also reduce potential for falls.

Parking lots can be a major cause of many slip, trip, and fall accidents. Wet, icy surfaces can make it difficult to walk into and out of work. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over one million Americans suffer a slip, trip, and fall injury and more than 17,000 people die in the U.S. annually because of these injuries. But parking lots and walkways can be hazardous even in dry conditions. Cracks, depressions, and uneven surfaces especially at the transition between asphalt and concrete walkways can cause people to trip and fall. A preventative maintenance program is essential to addressing issues as they occur and not waiting until someone reports an injury.

To prevent falls in parking lots and walkways outside, maintenance can inspect surfaces often, seal cracks to reduce frost heaves, replace blown light bulbs to keep areas well lit, paint curbs, islands, ramps, and wheel stops and any other elevation changes with colorful slip-resistant paint. Ensure drain covers are flush with the surface, ensure roof drains do not discharge into sidewalks and maintain awnings and canopies at entryways. With poor weather conditions, clear parking lots and walking surfaces before shift changes. Use deicers and abrasives such as salt and sand to melt snow and provide traction. All employees should wear slip-resistant footwear and wet floor caution signs can be used at entrances.

## Conclusion

While there may be numerous ways employees can slip, trip, or fall at work, there are also plenty of solutions to minimize the risk. It all starts with inspecting the work environment and then implementing the best preventive measures, whether that be replacing worn out rugs or cleaning up spills when they occur. Each employee has a role to play in preventing injuries that could have a lifetime of effects.

## Group activity

Break employees into small groups and ask them to inspect high fall hazard areas. Have them note potential risks in those areas, what is already available to prevent falls, and what could be added. This may include cleaning products for spills, step stools, higher-quality rugs, or changes to procedures such as mopping half of the floor to allow for a safe walking area then finishing the mopping once the first section is dry.

## Resources

[OSHA website for Nursing Home and Personal Care Facilities](#)

[Ladder Safety: Falling Off Ladders Can Kill: Use Them Safely](#) in English and Spanish

[Slip, Trip, and Fall Prevention for Healthcare Workers](#)