



Food/Drink Policies For Medical Practices

Should food and drinks be allowed at nurses stations?

OSHA Consideration

OSHA is concerned only with the health and safety of employees, so regarding food and drink at nurses stations, the issue is whether or not employees could be harmed from contamination of their food/drink with either infectious materials (blood, body fluids) or hazardous chemicals. If even a remote possibility of contamination exists, then food and drink should be prohibited by the employer. This is a judgement call that must be made at each particular facility by management. One consideration for establishing policy is whether or not lab specimens pass through the area.

Other Considerations

OSHA compliance is not the only issue. Each medical practice must establish policies and procedures regarding employee dress, demeanor, etc. These policies are formulated by the management, and are based on a combination of OSHA, infection control, usual and customary behavior for medical offices, and common sense. Insurance company auditors often cite medical practices for having food/drink in the business area. Aesthetic issues are also a factor, e.g., do front office personnel appear professional to customers (patients) when eating/drinking? Does the sound/odor offend others? Could drinks spill on computer keyboards or patient records? Consider employees' viewpoint when deciding on an office food/drink policy. Are employees who wish to eat/drink at their workstation provided with adequate break times? Formulate conservative policies and discipline those who do not comply.

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