



OSHA Compliance in Non-Acute Healthcare Facilities

WHITE PAPER

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Introduction to Compliance and Standards

OSHA Compliance Breeds a Culture of Safety

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is a division of the U.S. Department of Labor that holds employers accountable for keeping their workers safe. The agency sets and enforces standards that employers across a range of industries must follow. There are general rules that pertain to workplaces in every industry and more specific requirements that apply only to certain industries, such as healthcare.

What is OSHA Compliance?

Complying with OSHA is the law. Organizations that fully meet OSHA's requirements understand the standards that apply to their settings and actively meet the regulations as demonstrated by comprehensive policies, regular training and clear documentation.¹ Organizations that are consistently compliant are effective at keeping staff, patients and visitors safe. They can also experience higher employee morale and retention, and greater patient satisfaction.

Much of the discussion around OSHA compliance for healthcare organizations focuses on the hospital setting, however non-acute care facilities must maintain robust compliance as well. The term non-acute care applies to various types of healthcare organizations, including outpatient clinics, surgery centers, dental offices, physician practices and long-term care organizations. Care that takes place in these settings involves multiple disciplines and is aimed at treating a patient's chronic or non-emergency condition.

The Critical OSHA Standards for Non-Acute Care Facilities

Although there are many OSHA requirements that healthcare organizations must follow, there are two sets of regulations that rise to the top of the priority list—the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard and the Hazard Communication Standard. Following these regulations is essential to healthcare worker safety because they address substantial risks present in the healthcare environment.

Unfortunately, non-acute care facilities—especially smaller ones—often struggle to maintain compliance with these two rules. In fact, the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard is one of OSHA's most frequently cited standards for violations and is the most common standard for which small healthcare facilities may be non-compliant. Likewise, the Hazard Communication Standard is cited regularly, in part because the regulatory requirements have changed over time. Becoming familiar with these standards and creating solid programs to follow them is critical to ensuring OSHA compliance over the long term.





Bloodborne Pathogens Standard

The Bloodborne Pathogens Standard addresses one of healthcare's prime worker safety risks—the inadvertent transmission of bloodborne pathogens (BBP). A bloodborne pathogen is a microorganism that may be present in blood or other body fluids and can lead to serious disease. Bloodborne pathogens include viruses, bacteria, fungi, prions or other microorganisms, including parasites. Transmission of bloodborne pathogens can occur when workers are stuck or cut with a contaminated sharp object, such as a needle or scalpel, or have an open wound that comes into contact with biocontaminated material.

To be in compliance with the BBP Standard, healthcare organizations at risk for staff exposure must have a thorough exposure control plan that outlines risks, prevention strategies and response procedures if a worker is exposed.² In addition, organizations must provide comprehensive training and offer preventive immunizations to at-risk staff, as well as clearly label any biohazardous material.

Exposure Control Plan

This document is one of the first things OSHA will ask for if an OSHA officer inspects on-site. As such, organizations should be certain their plans are readily accessible. Here are a few essential topics to cover within the plan:³

- Procedures for identifying which workers could be exposed as part of their jobs and thus require training and protection
- Methods for protecting staff, including descriptions of universal and standard precautions, engineering controls, work practice controls, administrative controls and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Policies outlining Hepatitis B vaccination and addressing post-exposure evaluation and follow-up
- Procedures for the evaluation of circumstances surrounding exposure incidents

Organizations must review and update their written plan at least annually to ensure both workplace safety and compliance. They also must be able to show documentation that the review occurred and takes into consideration the perspective of non-managerial staff. In addition, staff should be able to readily access the plan.

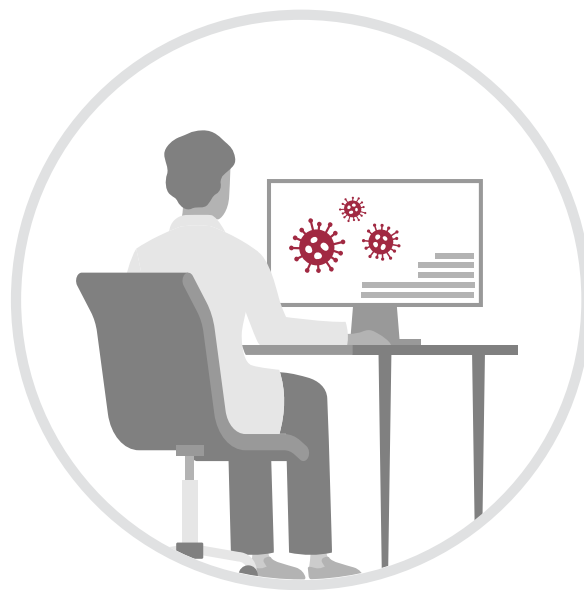
To be confident an exposure control plan includes all the required elements, an organization may benefit from working with an outside partner like Stericycle. Stericycle's Safety Plan Builder, available through MyStericycle.com, guides an organization in generating comprehensive safety documents, including exposure control plans. This straightforward tool allows a staff member to customize a plan to his or her organization in less than an hour with no previous OSHA experience needed. Stericycle certifies that plans created using the Safety Plan Builder include all necessary elements required by OSHA. In addition, forms to document plan review are also included. By using this tool, organizations can have peace of mind that they are fully compliant and can demonstrate that exposure control processes are compliant and up-to-date.



BBP Training

Organizations must provide training to any employee who is at risk for bloodborne pathogens exposure. Such training should outline the requirements of the BBP standard and how staff can remain safe and compliant. Training should occur as part of orientation and at least annually as a refresher. In addition, employees should have supplemental trainings if/ when they assume new or modified tasks that increase their risk for exposure.

Online training modules can be especially helpful in meeting the standard's training and education requirements because staff can access the content at their convenience and gain a complete picture of their role in preserving safety.⁴ The modules are updated as needed, so organizations can be sure they are consistently in compliance with OSHA's regulations.



OSHA's Recordkeeping Requirements

OSHA has defined recordkeeping requirements, which dictate that certain covered employers, including healthcare organizations, must prepare and maintain records related to serious employee injury or illness that occurs because of conditions in the workplace.⁵ More specifically, some organizations are required to fill out detailed incident reports (Form 301), keep a log of all incidents over time (Form 300), and document those that happen within a defined year (Form 300A).

These forms must be completed when there is a fatality or if a staff member is injured to the point that he or she loses consciousness; has to take days off from work; has the nature of his or her work restricted; is forced to transfer to another job; or receives medical treatment beyond first aid. Severe illnesses that are work related must be recorded, just like needlesticks and other injuries. Organizations must keep this information confidential to preserve the privacy of staff, and must retain medical records for the duration of employment and for 30 years afterwards, to OSHA on request. Employees must also be granted easy access to the records that pertain to them.

Certain healthcare providers—those that OSHA deems at risk for severe injuries—must electronically submit their 300A forms to OSHA each year. While many types of hospitals must meet this requirement, some non-acute organizations must as well, including certain long-term care and rehabilitation facilities. Organizations should check to see if they must submit records electronically and make sure they have processes in place to ensure compliance.



Hepatitis B Vaccination

Hepatitis B is a serious bloodborne pathogen, which can cause life-threatening illness. To lessen the chance of staff exposure, organizations must make the Hepatitis B vaccine available to at-risk employees at no cost to the worker at a time that's convenient.⁶ It also must be administered according to the recommendations of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). Staff must receive training on the vaccine: its efficacy, safety, method of administration, the benefit of being vaccinated, and that the vaccine will be offered free of charge.

Biohazard Labeling

To make sure staff are aware of the potential BBP exposure risks around them, OSHA requires biohazard labeling and color-coding for certain items in the healthcare space.⁷ These items fall into five general categories:

1. Regulated medical waste containers
2. Sharps containers
3. Bags with contaminated laundry
4. Specimens
5. Equipment

Depending on the category, a label or color-code may be preferable or both indicators recommended. For example, regulated medical waste containers should be clearly labeled and color-coded. Contaminated laundry may be kept in color-coded bags.

Sharps Disposal Solutions

Improper sharps disposal can increase the risk of needlestick injuries, which can lead to the spread of bloodborne pathogens. Specially designed disposal containers that are puncture resistant and prevent overflow are just one example of a workplace control that an organization may want to include in its OSHA compliance program to help address this problem. Such solutions can mitigate the risk of needlesticks and limit the occupational injuries associated with biohazardous medical waste.⁸



Hazard Communication Standard

OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard outlines how healthcare organizations must inform employees about any hazardous chemicals to which they may be exposed at work.⁹ Key aspects of standard compliance include creating a written hazard communication program that details what information needs to be communicated, when and to whom; properly labeling hazardous chemicals; making Safety Data Sheets (SDS) readily accessible; and providing employee training.

Written Hazard Communication Program

A first step in complying with this standard is to create a written policy that lists the hazardous chemicals the organization has on site and describes what the organization does to communicate the safety risks and health issues associated with these chemicals to employees. To keep staff and patients safe, organizations should regularly review and update this policy to reflect organizational and regulatory changes. Staff should be trained on any changes and have access to the written program.

Proper Labeling

The manufacturer's label on containers holding hazardous chemicals must provide the following information:

- The product identifier or name
- A signal word that underscores the threat, such as "danger" or "warning"
- A hazard statement that relates to the relevant hazard class and category
- Pictograms or symbols that convey health and physical information
- Precautionary statements that provide measures to minimize or prevent adverse effects
- Supplier information, including name, address and telephone number



While product labels will come from the manufacturer or supplier, if chemicals are removed from the original, labeled container, **organizations must create a workplace label and apply it to the secondary container.**



Safety Data Sheets

Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) communicate essential information about hazardous chemicals, answering questions such as:¹⁰

- What is the chemical?
- What are the chemical's properties and hazards?
- What protective measures and safety precautions are required?
- What handling and storage practices are needed?

Organizations must have an SDS for each hazardous chemical in their inventories and ensure the information is readily accessible in the work area for staff who could come in contact with the chemical.

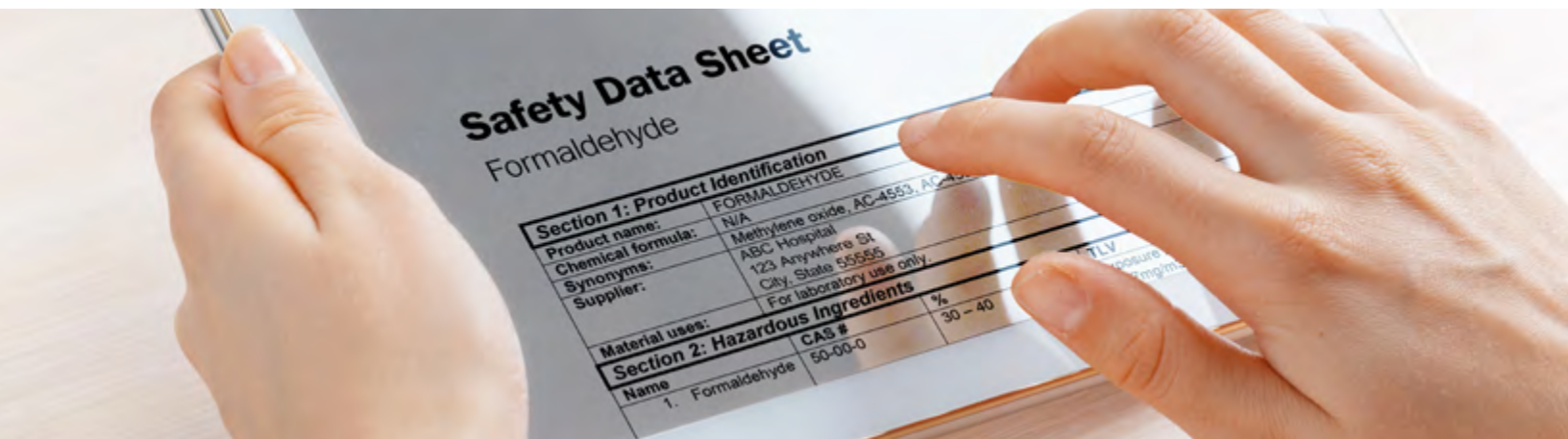
Hazard Communication Training

OSHA requires organizations to provide hazard communication training when a worker is initially assigned to a position that has the potential for hazardous chemical exposure. Training is also required when there is a new hazardous chemical introduced into the work area for which employees have not previously been trained.

Some of the topics that hazard communication training should address include:

- Any physical, health or other hazards associated with the chemicals
- How staff can protect themselves, including the use of personal protective equipment, workplace practices and emergency procedures
- How to access the hazard communication program and master list of hazardous chemicals
- Proper labeling elements
- How to access Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)
- Methods used to detect the release of chemicals

As with other aspects of OSHA compliance, online training modules can be beneficial in providing staff the information they need to remain safe and compliant.¹¹





OSHA Requirements and Enforcement

Understanding State vs. Federal OSHA Requirements

OSHA's jurisdiction varies by state because the agency has authorized certain states and Puerto Rico to operate their own safety and health agencies.¹² It's important for healthcare organizations to understand whether their state has requirements different from, or in addition to, the federal regulations. In some cases, the rules found in state OSHAs are more restrictive than at the federal level. When working on compliance, organizations should check state and federal requirements and aim to meet whichever rules are most rigorous. Stericycle can help organizations identify the requirements that apply to them, ensuring organizations remain fully compliant.

Navigating OSHA's Enforcement Policy

Despite an organization's best efforts, it may still receive a visit from OSHA.¹³ The agency may show up to a facility unannounced and examine documentation and records pertaining to worker safety.

What Happens During an OSHA Inspection?

When an OSHA compliance officer arrives at a healthcare facility, he or she will tell the organization the reason for the visit, whether it's due to a general review or a specific complaint. The officer will then conduct an inspection, following prescribed guidelines. The officer may review:

- Bloodborne pathogens exposure control plan
- Hazard communication program
- Recordkeeping documentation
- Training records, materials and documentation
- Other aspects of OSHA compliance

The officer may also conduct private interviews and take photographs and air samples.

After the visit concludes, OSHA will determine whether an organization failed to comply with applicable standards. Depending on the results of the assessment, an organization may receive a penalty, which can be significant. The amount of the penalty is tied to the seriousness of the violation; the size of the organization; whether the organization has shown a good faith effort to meet the standards; and whether there has been a history of previous violations. States that operate OSHA plans will have their own penalty levels. In addition to receiving a penalty, an organization also will be given an abatement date by which the entity must correct any deficiencies that OSHA noted.

The best way to prepare for a visit from OSHA is to keep an OSHA compliance program current, including any policies, training programs and documentation.¹⁴ In addition, conducting a mock visit can be helpful. Stericycle can assist organizations in conducting on-site mock OSHA evaluations, letting staff experience what an OSHA encounter might entail.

For more information on how Stericycle can help you stay compliant with OSHA's standards and the ever-changing regulatory landscape, visit [Stericycle.com/OSHA](https://www.stericycle.com/OSHA).

Why Steri-Safe® Compliance Solutions?

Your patients are at the center of everything you do.
Let us handle the rest.

When you choose Stericycle, you're selecting a partner with the resources to stand by your healthcare practice when things are easy and when they're hard. Whether it's through our award-winning OSHA and HIPAA trainings or through our portfolio of waste disposal services, Stericycle provides support where you need it and simplicity where you don't. Find out why practices of all sizes partner with Stericycle.



Simple, Professional Service

We've designed our operations to deliver convenience, with minimal intrusion into your busy schedule. Using on-demand digital tools and professional drivers with a 99.7% on-time track record⁸, we keep your back office running smoothly.



Expert Partners By Your Side

Our team of in-house OSHA and HIPAA experts provide deep knowledge when and where you want it. From online training to live audits to acute response, Stericycle partners with you to manage both day to day needs and unexpected situations.



One Source, Countless Solutions

From biohazardous and pharmaceutical waste to OSHA and HIPAA training to medical products, Stericycle offers an unparalleled breadth of services. Build a package that's right for you, and we'll grow our partnership alongside your business.

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We protect what matters.

