

Clarifying Food and Drink Safety for Clinicians

The safety of clinician food and drink is governed by the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) [Bloodborne Pathogens](#) and [Sanitation](#) Standards. In response to questions from the field, The Joint Commission is clarifying how the regulation does or does not apply in relation to spaces where clinicians and staff may consume or store food and drink.

Clarification 1: Joint Commission standards do not specifically address where staff can have food or drink in work areas.

Joint Commission standards do not specifically address where staff can have food or drink in work areas, including nursing and physician stations. Instead, Joint Commission Leadership (LD) Standard LD.04.01.01 requires that health care organizations follow licensure requirements, laws, and regulations, including OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

Specifically, OSHA's regulation prohibits the consumption of food and drink in areas where work involving exposure or potential exposure to blood or other potentially infectious or toxic material exists, or where the potential for contamination of work surfaces exists.^{1,2} OSHA's regulation also prohibits consuming or storing food in areas where blood or other potentially infectious or toxic materials are located or stored, including the following³:

- Refrigerators
- Cabinets
- Shelves
- Counters


Clarification 2: Health care organizations may determine safe spaces for food and drink that comply with an employer's evaluation or exposure control plans.

Health care organizations retain the ability to define and establish safe eating areas for staff members. OSHA does require that health care organizations evaluate the workplace to determine locations where potential contamination may occur and prohibit employees from eating or drinking in those areas.

An employer's evaluation will determine what areas represent the risks for contamination from 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 particular nurse or physician station or other location is separated from work areas subject to contamination and therefore it is reasonable to anticipate that occupational exposure through the contamination of food and beverages or their containers is not likely.⁴

Importantly, some areas will be strictly off-limits to food and drink containers. For example, staff should not be eating in areas where specimens are collected, processed, or stored.

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

Questions can be directed to [Patrick Ross](#), MPH, federal relations specialist, or [Sylvia Garcia-Houchins](#), MBA, RN, CIC, director infection prevention and control, Office of Quality and Patient Safety. 

References

1. US Occupational Safety and Health Administration. [Standard Interpretations: Eating and drinking in area where potentially infectious material exists](#). Accessed Feb 5, 2019.
2. US Occupational Health and Safety Administration. [Standard Interpretations: Consuming food and/or beverages in the same work area where known hazardous chemicals are used](#). Accessed Feb 19, 2019.
3. US Occupational Safety and Health Administration. [Bloodborne pathogens](#). 29 CFR 1910.1030(d)(2)(x). Accessed Feb 5, 2019.
4. US Occupational Safety and Health Administration. [Standard Interpretations: Requirements for covered beverages at nurses' stations](#). Accessed Feb 5, 2019.