



Veterinary Safety and Health

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as reported by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), at least 32,000 injuries to a veterinary professional and staff were reported in 2016; ranging from puncture wounds, body aches and soreness, lacerations, sprains and bruises, and carpal tunnel syndrome. The Journal of the American Veterinary Association (JAVMA) published a study that found 50-67% of Veterinarians and 98% of Veterinary Technicians experienced an animal related injury during their veterinary career. Veterinary professionals are keenly aware of the risk they put themselves in on a daily basis, but it is important for every clinic to exercise safety and awareness in order to avoid injuries and accidents to the veterinary staff.

One of the best ways to avoid injuries at your place of business or off premises is to have a safety manual and ensure everyone in your practice is properly trained. Assign a dedicated person responsible for the company's safety or form a safety committee that can hold regular meetings. Conducting trainings on safety topics will also keep safety a priority. Having your employees always thinking about their wellbeing and following proper guidelines will keep not only them, but also your clients, and their animals out of harm's way.



Animal Handling and Restraint

Animal induced injuries are by far the number one source of accidents in the veterinary field, followed by sprains and strains, with trip and falls coming in closely at number three. Handling or restraining an animal correctly should mean doing it in a humane way that is safe for you and the animal. Always remember that the animal that is in your care is likely afraid and in a strange situation. Some animals are not used to being handled or restrained so it's best to make sure you are doing it correctly.

- Have a written protocol for animal restraint and handling and ensure everyone in your practice has been properly trained and follows it
- Communicate with your co-workers if you need assistance
- Read the animal's body language to determine if they're fearful, anxious, or aggressive
- Use your own body language to communicate to the animal that you are not a threat; give them some space when first meeting them, allow them to come to you or approach them sideways and slowly. If it's OK with the owner feed tiny bits of food to create a positive experience
- When appropriate, wear proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like leather gloves

Sharps Hazards

The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) published a study in 2012 that found 58% of their respondents reported a needlestick injury within the prior 5 years. Needlesticks can result in self-injecting harmful drugs, allergic reactions, and infections.

- AVMA recommends following the OSHA bloodborne diseases standard. <https://www.osha.gov/bloodborne-pathogens/standards>
- Be mindful and attentive when handling sharp objects
- Use a one-handed “scooping” technique when recapping needles
- Sharps containers should be located throughout the hospital, labeled, and changed regularly
- First Aid Kits should be available along with information for local EMS and Urgent Care facilities

Chemical Hazards

There are a variety of chemicals used in the veterinary hospital including, hazardous drugs, disinfectants, anesthetic gases, and even surgical smoke. Contact with these chemicals can cause various complications depending on the type of chemical and the length of exposure. Utmost care should be taken when handling any chemical.

- A list of all hazardous products that are onsite along with Safety Data Sheets should be available and updated regularly
- A written Hazard Communication Plan should also be available and discussed with all employees
- All chemical containers should be labeled with the chemical name and warnings
- Eye wash stations should be placed within 55 feet of any chemical hazard
- All employees should be trained on proper handling of chemicals

Radiography Hazards

A study performed by the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in 2012, found that at least 37% of veterinary professionals were accidentally exposed to x-rays during work. Exposure to x-rays can be detrimental to ones’ health and body, therefore proper training, protocols and PPE is necessary in decreasing the veterinary staff’s exposure.

- Minimize the time each employee is exposed to x-rays by using positioning devices, Velcro

restraints, or even a sedative when necessary. Manual restraint should only be used when other options are not appropriate

- Keep the farthest distance away from the x-ray machine and the patient as possible
- Always use PPE such as lead aprons, gloves, thyroid collars, and goggles. There should be no exceptions to this requirement
- All medical staff who operate x-ray machines or fluoroscopy units should wear dosimeters and have them read either monthly or quarterly to measure the amount of radiation an employee has been exposed to

Slips, Trips, and Falls

The simple act of walking around a veterinary facility can be hazardous as you’re commonly in a rush getting from patient to patient, your hands are full either with an animal or supplies, and there are sometimes fluids on the floor that may just seemingly appear out of nowhere!

- Fluids and other contaminants should be cleaned up immediately, and wet floor signs should be utilized to warn others of the slippery surface
- Keep potential hazardous objects such as boxes, electrical cords, or other items off the floor and neatly stored away
- Mats should be used near entrances to avoid tracking in moisture from outside
- All employees should wear slip-resistant shoes
- Have a documented housekeeping and maintenance protocol to ensure walking surfaces are kept clean and in good repair. Inspections should be done regularly, and any damaged or unsafe areas should be repaired immediately

Ergonomic and Musculoskeletal Hazards

Back injuries, sprains, and repetitive motion injuries are common as they occur from lifting, restraining, and treating animals of varying sizes. Extensive computer use can also cause ergonomic issues.

- Always follow proper lifting procedures
- Use equipment such as hand trucks, gurneys, and hoists when lifting heavy objects or animals
- Train all employees on animal and material movement techniques

- All heavy items should be stored waist to chest high to help with lifting
- Practice proper posture at all times!



Food and Beverage Safety

Food safety in the veterinary setting is important because not only can it create slip and falls hazards if knocked over, but it can also create health hazards if kept near treatment areas. A “No food or beverage” rule should be instituted in all treatment areas, labs, surgical suites, and exam rooms. Food and drinks should only be allowed in break rooms and office areas.

Sources:

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