

Long-term health effects working as a nurse

Several vital organs may be adversely affected by prolonged exposure to chemicals including the respirator, neurologic, reproductive, dermal, and hematopoietic systems. For example, ethylene oxide has been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a known human carcinogen (Group 1).

- Adverse effects from long-time exposure to chemicals like medications (e.g. anti-neoplastic drugs), sterilizing agents (e.g. glutaraldehyde), and anesthetic gases.
- Fatigue and lower back pain.
- Diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis.
- Infectious skin irritation and dermatoses from frequent use of soaps, detergents and disinfectants.
- Latex allergy.

Source: Nurse, general (institutional), International Hazard Datasheets on Occupations, International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (IOSH).

- 1 Hand washing is extremely important for the reduction of infections associated with body fluids & blood-borne diseases (e.g. AIDS, hepatitis B and C). Moisturizers should be used to prevent dry skin.
- 2 Learn proper techniques to avoid needle stick injuries.
- 3 Always use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) or other barriers for the task. In some cases, latex gloves will not be appropriate (e.g. cleaning with certain chemicals).
- 4 Wear appropriate footwear (for walking/standing, as well as protection from dropped objects).
- 5 Learn safe patient lifting techniques, create a safe patient handling program.
- 6 If a job requires work in an awkward position (e.g. with hands above shoulder level) be sure to take frequent breaks.
- 7 Follow a recommended shift work pattern, and be aware of the hazards associated with shift work.

General Safe Practices for Nurse-midwives to Prevent Health Hazards

- 8 Consider offering a debriefing or session after a critical event to help reduce the impact from stress.
- 9 Ask your workplace to establish safe procedures for working alone or develop procedures where this situation can be avoided altogether.
- 10 Keep all hallways and passages clear of clutter and equipment.
- 11 Install and maintain adequate ventilation for the area.
- 12 Keep all radiation levels to a minimum and wear a radiation dosimeter, as recommended by the radiation safety officer or regulatory authorities.
- 13 If work is in the nuclear medicine department or involves working with patients being treated or tested by such departments, staff should be given appropriate training to prevent or control exposure to radiation sources.

Source: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Vaccination for Nurse-midwives

Occupationally acquired infections can be prevented by taking reasonable precautions to prevent transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases.

- a Tetanus (15-49yr aged)
- b Hepatitis B (all health professionals)
- c Influenza

It is advisable that any NMs facing workplace health problems, should consult with concerned health personnel/department:

- Supervisor or Administrator/Manager.
- Doctor or medical professional.
- Health and safety committee or representative.
- Social Welfare Department



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GUIDELINE



Workplace Safety and Health for Nurses and Midwives

Nursing is a dynamic growing profession and valued in the community. Due to their nature of work, nurse and midwives continue to be exposed to many safety and health hazards associated to their work which may lead to workplace injury or health problem and thus prevent them from performing their duties effectively. Workplace health hazard may affect a nurse-midwife not only physically but psychologically as well and even to the extent of disability.

This guideline specifies various health hazards that nurse –midwives (NMs) may expose to in their respective workplace and necessary measures to protect themselves through safe practices.

It is essential
to establish
commitment
for a
safe workplace
to ensure safety
and health
for the
Nurses and
Midwives



Possible Health Hazards in Workplace



Biological

Nurses can be exposed to contagious and infectious diseases including those that can be transmitted through the air (e.g. TB- tuberculosis), and blood-borne diseases such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C and hand to hand transmission (e.g. Clostridium difficile). There is also the risk of exposure to multi-drug resistant organisms such as multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and others. Nurses may acquire certain skin conditions such as dermatitis as a consequence of the need for frequent hand washing. There is also the risk of falling ill due to needle stick injury.



Chemical

In a hospital environment, nurses may encounter:

- Various chemicals used for general janitorial cleaning as well as for disinfecting and sterilizing.
- Anesthetic gases as well as waste anesthetic gases.
- Drugs or medications.
- Latex (in gloves and equipment).



Physical

There are many situations where physical work demands force, repetition, awkward postures and prolonged activities. These include walking or standing for long periods of time or lifting or overexertion (reaching, carrying, etc.).

Psychological

Nurses often experience forms of violence at work, when working alone or working alone with patients. They may experience increased stress during providing care, emergency management, and taking certain decisions when concerned health professionals/care providers cannot be found. Exposure to serious traumatic events

(or consequence of the event) is another cause of stress. In case of most emergency services, long periods of quiet or routine work are interrupted abruptly by periods of intense stress or activity. Most nurses work shifts or extended work days which can have health effects.



Exposure to Radiation

Nurses can be exposed to:

- Radiation: both x-rays and radiation from radioisotopes.
- Lasers.



Safety

In a hospital, there are many situations where there is equipment in various places, liquid on floors, etc. The main hazards from these situations are slips, trips and falls. There is also a risk of items falling onto the person. Nurses may also be exposed to burns or scalds from hot sterilizing equipment, and stabs or cuts from sharp objects.