

OCCUPATIONAL RISKS

Medical Assisting is a profession with many rewards, as practitioners can perform both administrative and clinical services, filling several roles in a variety of healthcare environments. The Bureau of Labor Statistics clearly outlines that it is a growth field, with an anticipated 18% growth from 2020 to 2030.

Medical Assistants work directly with providers and patients, with the goal of providing healthcare and ensuring patient safety. It is a position with a great deal of responsibility.

As with any healthcare position, certain occupational risks come into play with being a medical assistant, and those hazards include the following:

Category I: A task or activity in which direct contact or exposure to blood, other potentially infectious materials, or airborne pathogens (tuberculosis) is expected and to which standard precautions apply.

Category I occupational exposure:

1. Performing lab tests
2. Collecting urinalysis and cultures
3. Measuring hematocrit
4. Performing capillary sticks
5. Performing accucheck
6. Preparing wright staining
7. Performing phlebotomy
8. Assisting with minor surgery
9. Obtaining specimens; stool, urine, throat, vaginal, etc.
10. Autoclaving/sterilizing/disinfecting
11. Administering medication
12. Irrigating: eye, ear, wound, and nasal
13. Applying and removing dressings
14. Exposure to bloodborne pathogens (BBP) contaminants from cleaning blood spills and any other body fluids visibly contaminated with blood and all body fluids in situations where it is difficult or impossible to differentiate between body fluids.

Category II: A task or activity performed without exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials, or airborne pathogens (tuberculosis) and to which standard precautions apply, but exposure to another person's blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) might occur as an abnormal event or an emergency or may be required to perform unplanned Category I tasks or activities.

Category II occupational exposure:

1. Measuring vital signs
2. Performing an EKG
3. Assisting with exams
4. Positioning and draping
5. Applying heat and cold therapy

6. Performing physical therapy
7. Performing respiratory therapy
8. Performing radiology
9. Collecting a throat culture
10. Using a microscope
11. Performing venipuncture
12. Exposure to BBP contaminants from cleaning blood spills and any other body fluids visibly contaminated with blood and all body fluids in situations where it is difficult or impossible to differentiate between body fluids

At the same time, there are protections set up with the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), and those protections are particularly important within a healthcare environment. OSHA has a series of standards that protect the safety of healthcare workers and patients.

Accredited medical assisting programs are required to teach students about the hazards that they face on the job and the protocols that can be put into place to ensure a workplace culture that prioritizes safety.