Restoration & Remediation in Healthcare Settings

Restoration and remediation processes often involve potential health hazards. Handling a loss in a healthcare environment requires special training and knowledge of how to work around vulnerable patients who are ill and may have immune-compromised systems. Issues such as dwell time, work area isolation and proper infection control practices are vital.

WHEN WORKING IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THESE KEY ISSUES:

- Errors Can Spell the Difference Between Life or Death
- Risks That Need to Be Addressed Cautiously
- Regulations, Training and Compliance Issues
Key Issue #1

Errors Can Mean Life or Death

Healthcare facilities vary greatly in type and purpose. Some, such as urgent care centers, see patients on a short-term, outpatient basis. Others, such as assisted living facilities, have long-term residents. In many healthcare facilities, space is valuable and patients may have nowhere else to go.

Many patients are elderly or have long medical histories. Susceptible individuals with health conditions, poor immune function or general frailty may be especially sensitive to environmental hazards triggered by HVAC system negligence or poor maintenance. Case in point: A poorly maintained air conditioner may cause Legionnaires’ disease (a form of pneumonia).

Strict adherence to restoration and remediation best practices is critical in healthcare settings. If not managed properly and professionally, these building services can expose patients to serious risks with life-threatening consequences.

A patient with respiratory issues, for example, may suffer from dangerous breathing complications as a result of poor air quality. A patient recovering from surgery may become sick with an infection spread by a third party. For patients already vulnerable, these complications can spell the difference between life and death.

Work must be done cleanly, efficiently and safely, and the patient’s well-being must be prioritized.

Restoration and remediation processes may be needed in many types of healthcare facilities, including:
- Medical Offices and Clinics
- Urgent Care Centers
- Long Term and Memory Care facilities
- Dialysis and Radiology Centers
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Hospices
- Ambulatory Surgical Centers
- Hospitals
- Senior Communities
Key Issue #2

Risks That Need to Be Addressed

Restoration and remediation contractors must be aware of many risks when working in a healthcare facility.

Water can cause significant damage to a building’s structure and its contents. Before water restoration begins, excess water must be removed, and water-damaged drywall may also require extraction. If water mitigation is not performed adequately, mold may result.

Mold can be hazardous to anyone’s health, but patients with compromised immune function are especially sensitive. Mold must be removed thoroughly to prevent potentially serious health complications.

Case in point: In 2019, a hospital in the Pacific Northwest announced it had to shut down several surgical operating rooms because of the presence of Aspergillus, a common mold that can be dangerous for at-risk individuals. Several deaths have been linked to Aspergillus infections at that hospital since 2001.

Many other environmental exposures can also be hazardous. For patients who are already having breathing difficulties, the presence of dust or fine particle matter is especially dangerous. Surgeries and other sensitive procedures require a sterile environment and a clean room for post-surgery rehabilitation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, staph bacteria can be found on people’s skin and are usually harmless but can lead to serious infections. Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, is a type of staph bacteria. MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics and is therefore difficult to treat. Awareness of sanitary best practices is key.
Key Issue #2 (Continued)

**Building Systems Risks**
Healthcare facilities must manage incredibly high standards in HVAC filtration and water systems repair, maintenance and installation. Restoration and remediation workers must be well trained to follow procedures that meet these protocols. Temporary engineering controls equipped with specialized air filters to establish a negative pressure environment may have to be installed in the workspace. Proper surface cleaning procedures are necessary with the toxicity levels of all disinfectants used closely monitored.

Healthcare providers demand specialized care to run their facilities using trained professionals whom only a certified and experienced restoration and remediation contractor can deliver.

**Irritating Noise Risks**
Restoration and remediation can be disruptive for patients and caregivers. Patients may need to be relocated, and noise may make it difficult for patients in the vicinity to get adequate rest. Patient comfort is an issue that must be addressed, as it is vital to proper recovery.
Key Issue #2 (Continued)

Hazardous Medical Waste Risks
The healthcare industry produces more than a ton of medical waste daily with the potential to spread contagion. Care in handling hypodermic needles, bloody gauze and used applicators requires the right kind of awareness and training. Infections can be viral or bacterial in nature. Some, such as MRSA, are especially dangerous. Infections may spread on contaminated products, tools or equipment, by caregivers and visiting third parties.

It is well documented that infection transmission is a real and ongoing risk that can be associated with construction activity in a healthcare setting. Contractors may inadvertently aid in the spread of infections, both within a single facility and from one facility to another. While your average restoration and remediation provider may not think of infection-control as part of their job, it is absolutely vital in a healthcare environment.

Work Isolation Barriers
When carrying out restoration and remediation services, some hazards are unavoidable. Therefore, they must be contained. Work isolation barriers are an essential tool in the containment process.

The use of temporary barriers can help contain mold, dust and other contaminants. HVAC system barriers can also keep potentially dangerous materials from contaminating ventilation systems. Barriers may also reduce noise, thereby allowing patients to have a more peaceful recovery.
Much like the insurance industry, healthcare is subject to myriad regulations. Operators of healthcare facilities and contractors performing restoration and remediation services must be aware of compliance issues. Training and education are absolutely essential.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) includes protections for individuals’ medical records and protected health information. Healthcare providers are not allowed to disclose protected health information for unauthorized purposes, and violations can result in significant fines.

Contractors providing restoration and remediation services in healthcare facilities should be aware of HIPAA requirements that govern how patient records must be handled, and patient privacy must be respected.

Infection control risk assessments (ICRA) can reduce the risk of infection. Without proper training and guidelines, contractors working in healthcare settings may spread infections as they move from one worksite to another. As a result, patient lives could be put in danger. An ICRA provides a clear process for infection control.

Hospital-acquired infections, also called nosocomial infections, may spread as a result of construction, restoration and remediation processes. According to the World Health Organization, for every 100 hospital stays in developed countries, seven patients develop health care-associated infections.
Key Issue #3 (Continued)

Because restoration and remediation services can introduce additional hazards into a healthcare setting, an Interim Life Safety Measures (ILSM) program is important in maintaining high safety standards. The Joint Commission Resources offers *Interim Life Safety Measures Revisited: 6 Steps for an Effective Program* for guidance on developing an ILSM program.

The [American Hospital Association](https://www.aha.org) provides a healthcare construction certificate, which may be suitable for experienced contractors who provide reconstruction services for healthcare centers. By earning an AHA healthcare construction certificate, restoration and remediation service providers prove their expertise and dedication to patient safety.
About American Technologies, Inc.

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