Healthcare and Social Assistance Program

NIOSH® National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

What are our priorities?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Healthcare and Social Assistance (HCSA) Program works with partners in industry, labor, trade associations, professional organizations, and academia. The program focuses on these areas:

- Mitigating the effects of suboptimal work organization characteristics such as scheduling, workload, sleep quality and duration, on outcomes such as stress, anxiety, fatigue, depression, burnout, suicide, and chronic illnesses.

- Preventing injuries from lifting, falls, sharp instruments, and a variety of physical hazards including radiation and noise.

- Interrupting transmission of bloodborne and respiratory pathogens and drug-resistant organisms.

- Minimizing exposure to hazardous drugs and chemicals, allergens, and other substances associated with risk for cancer, adverse reproductive outcomes, dermal diseases, and work-related asthma.

- Reducing injuries associated with violent acts, especially among home care workers and workers in non-standard work arrangements.

What do we do?

- Conduct surveillance for work-related deaths, injuries, diseases, and risk factors. Provide findings to the research community, employers, workers, and other stakeholders to guide research and prevention efforts.

- Address knowledge gaps and barriers to developing effective prevention strategies. Examples include determining risk factors for disease transmission and injury mechanisms.

- Develop and demonstrate effective methods of prevention. Make recommendations that can be used by professional organizations, employers, workers, and government agencies.

- Disseminate useful prevention strategies for all HCSA workers. Reduce disparities through outreach to higher-risk, underserved, and vulnerable HCSA worker populations.

- Seek opportunities to make workers safer and healthier by addressing hazards without negatively affecting patient care.
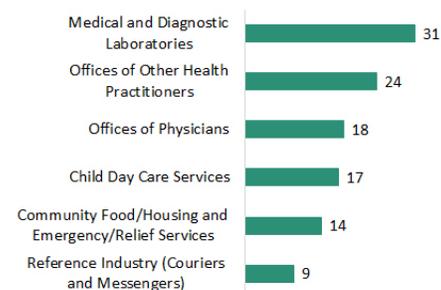
What have we accomplished?

- Characterized use of personal protective equipment among pregnant and non-pregnant nurses who administer antineoplastic drugs using data from the Nurses' Health Study 3.

- Described respirator use practices for prominent healthcare hazards using data from the NIOSH Health and Safety Practices Survey of Healthcare Workers.

- Assessed proportionate mortality ratios for suicide among U.S. veterinarians during 1979–2015 by sex, species specialization, and practice setting.

- Compared differences in safety climate perception by individual and work characteristics using data from the NIOSH Health and Safety Practices Survey of Healthcare Workers.

- Evaluated healthcare worker exposure to volatile organic compounds during cleaning and disinfection tasks.

- Identified a unique cluster of nine cases of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis among dental personnel.

What's next?

- Describe characteristics associated with suicide among veterinarians and veterinary technicians using the National Violent Death Reporting System.

- Measure exposures to cleaning and disinfection products and evaluate the relationship between these products and health effects in an acute care hospital.

- Characterize differences in healthcare coverage, health-related behaviors, and health outcomes among patient care aides by healthcare setting.

- Identify how the materials used in gloves can affect the transfer of bacteria and viruses to and from surfaces.
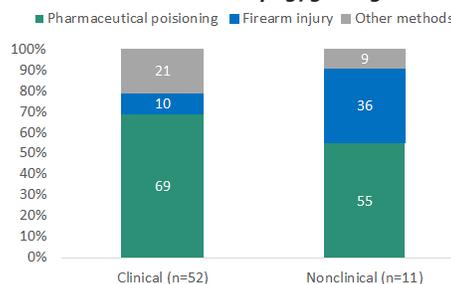

At-A-Glance

The Healthcare and Social Assistance Program's mission is to eliminate occupational diseases, injuries, and fatalities in industries providing human and veterinary healthcare and social assistance services across a broad range of settings such as hospitals, clinics, nursing and private homes, and child day care. This snapshot shows recent accomplishments and upcoming work.

Prevalence (%) of hearing loss among noise-exposed workers in healthcare industries that is significantly different than the reference industry, 2003–2012
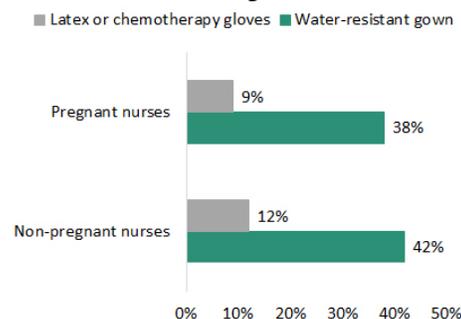

Industry	%
Medical and Diagnostic Laboratories	31
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	24
Offices of Physicians	18
Child Day Care Services	17
Community Food/Housing and Emergency/Relief Services	14
Reference Industry (Couriers and Messengers)	9

Source: Masterson EA et al. [2018] JOEM 60(4):350-356.

Percentage of suicides among clinical and nonclinical female veterinarians classified by means of death, 1979–2015

Legend: Pharmaceutical poisioning, Firearm injury, Other methods

	Clinical (n=52)	Nonclinical (n=11)
Other methods	21	9
Firearm injury	10	36
Pharmaceutical poisioning	69	55

Source: Tomasi et al. [2019] J Am Vet Med Assoc. 254(1): 104-112.

Percent of pregnant and non-pregnant nurses who reported never using protective gloves and gowns while administering antineoplastic drugs

Legend: Latex or chemotherapy gloves, Water-resistant gown

	Latex or chemotherapy gloves	Water-resistant gown
Pregnant nurses	9%	38%
Non-pregnant nurses	12%	42%

Source: Lawson et al. [2019] Am J Nurs 119(1):28-35

To learn more, visit
https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/programs/hcsa/default.html

CDC NIOSH — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health