

# International Hazard Datasheets on Occupation



## Nurse, general (institutional)

### What is a Hazard Datasheet on Occupation?

This datasheet is one of the International Datasheets on Occupations. It is intended for those professionally concerned with health and safety at work: occupational physicians and nurses, safety engineers, hygienists, education and information specialists, inspectors, employers' representatives, workers' representatives, safety officers and other competent persons.

This datasheet lists, in a standard format, different hazards to which nurse, general (institutional) may be exposed in the course of their normal work. This datasheet is a source of information rather than advice. With the knowledge of what causes injuries and diseases, it is easier to design and implement suitable measures towards prevention.

This datasheet consists of four pages:

- Page 1: Information on the most relevant hazards related to the occupation.
- Page 2: A more detailed and systematized presentation on the **different hazards** related to the job with indicators for preventive measures (marked as numbered shields and explained on the third page).
- Page 3: Suggestions for **preventive measures** for selected hazards.
- Page 4: **Specialized information**, relevant primarily to occupational safety and health professionals and including information such as a brief job description, a list of tasks, notes and references.

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### Who is a general nurse?



A general nurse is a healthcare worker who is registered as a professional nurse and assists medical doctors in their tasks, deals with emergencies in their absence, and provides professional nursing care for the sick, injured, physically and mentally disabled, and others in need of such care.

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### What is dangerous about this job?

- General nurses are exposed to practically all of the acute hazards existing in the healthcare institutions where they work.
- General nurses may be exposed to infectious diseases due to direct contact with patients.
- General nurses use cleaning, disinfecting, and sterilizing agents that may damage the skin, mucous membranes, and respiratory system.
- General nurses may be exposed to anesthetic gases, drugs, and radiation.
- General nurses may be injured by sharp objects (needles, blades, etc.).
- Contact with hot surfaces, faulty electric equipment, etc. may cause skin burns.
- They may suffer from musculoskeletal problems and back pains resulting from the handling of heavy patients. Continuous work while standing or walking causes fatigue and leg problems.
- General nurses may suffer from stresses and burnout caused by shift and night work, their overall responsibility, and by other psychological and organizational factors.

## Hazards related to this job

<b>Accident hazards</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slips, trips, and falls on wet floors, especially during emergency situations.</li> </ul>	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stabs and cuts from sharp objects, especially needle-sticks and cuts by blades.</li> </ul>	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burns and scalds from contact with hot sterilizing equipment or hot water and steam pipes.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electrical shock from faulty or improperly grounded equipment, or equipment with faulty insulation.</li> </ul>	3 4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Injuries to legs and toes caused by falling objects, e.g., medical instruments.</li> </ul>	1 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acute back pain resulting from awkward body position or overexertion when handling heavy patients.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acute poisoning due to accidental release of a chemical agent.</li> </ul>	
<b>Physical hazards</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to radiation from x-ray and radioisotope sources.</li> </ul>	6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to laser radiation.</li> </ul>	
<b>Chemical hazards</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to chemicals during an accident (contact with scattered or spilled chemicals, leaking agents, and unidentified chemicals).</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Danger of poisoning due to exposure to vapors or gases released during mixing of unidentified substances (e.g., strong acids or oxidizers with organic compounds).</li> </ul>	7
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Danger of exposure to anesthetic gases (ethyl bromide, ethyl chloride, ethyl ether, halothane, nitrous oxide, etc.).</li> </ul>	7
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skin defatting, irritation, and dermatoses because of frequent use of soaps, detergents, disinfectants, etc.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat because of exposure to airborne aerosols or contact with droplets of washing or cleaning liquids.</li> </ul>	8
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic poisoning because of long-term exposure to medications, sterilizing fluids (e.g., glutaraldehyde), anesthetic gases, etc.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latex allergy caused by exposure to natural latex gloves and other latex-containing medical devices.</li> </ul>	9
<b>Biological hazards</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk of contracting a communicable disease from the patients.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infections due to the exposure to blood, body fluids or tissue specimens possibly leading to blood-borne diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C.</li> </ul>	10 11 12 13
<b>Ergonomic, psychosocial and organizational factors</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fatigue and lower back pain due to the handling of heavy patients and to long periods of work in a standing posture.</li> </ul>	14
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress, strained family relations, and burnout due to shift and night work, overtime work, and contact with sick patients, especially accident victims and their relatives.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because a general nurse is called to handle problems that can't be solved by other ward workers, the stress caused by work in emergency situations may be enhanced by frequent exposure.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to severely traumatized patients, multiple victims of a disaster or catastrophic event or severely violent patients may lead to post-traumatic stress syndrome.</li> </ul>	15

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**Preventive measures**

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- 1 Wear shoes designed for nurses, with non-slip soles.
  - 2 Handle sharp objects with extreme care; use special safety receptacles to store used hypodermic needles until disposal. Use safety needles, if available.
  - 3 Install ground fault circuit interrupters; call a qualified electrician to test and repair faulty or suspect equipment.
  - 4 Comply with all safety instructions on the installation and periodic inspection of electrical medical equipment.
  - 5 Keep all passages clearly visible and uncluttered.
  - 6 Wear a radiation dosimeter (badge or other) when exposed to radiation; comply with all safety instructions to reduce exposure to a minimum.
  - 7 Install air conditioning with effective general ventilation in the ward rooms to reduce heat stress and remove odors, gases, and vapors.
  - 8 Provide eye wash bottles or fountains.
  - 9 Nurses sensitive to natural rubber latex must use powder-free latex or non-latex gloves and avoid contact with other latex products.
  - 10 Follow established appropriate infection control precautions assuming blood, body fluids and tissue are infectious
  - 11 Routinely use barriers (such as gloves, eye protection (goggles or face shields) and gowns)
  - 12 Wash hands and other exposed skin surfaces after coming into contact with blood or body fluids
  - 13 Follow appropriate procedures in handling and disposing of sharp instruments or needles
  - 14 Provide lifting aids for the lifting and transport of heavy patients; consult an occupational safety specialist on the safe handling of heavy patients.
  - 15 Procedures and counselling services should be available to workers exposed to post-traumatic stress syndrome
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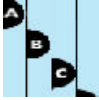
**Specialized information**


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**Synonyms** Nurse; nurse, certified; nurse, licensed; nurse, professional; nurse, registered

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**Definitions and/or description** A term applied to persons meeting the educational, legal, and training requirements to practice as professional nurses, as required by a State Board of Nursing. Performs acts requiring substantial specialized judgment and skill in observation, care, and counsel of ill, injured, or infirm persons and in promotion of health and prevention of illness. Classifications are made according to type of nursing activity engaged in as director, nursing service (medical ser.); nurse, general duty (medical ser.); nurse, private duty (medical ser.) [DOT].



**Related and specific occupations** Other patient-care nursing occupations classified according to ward, e.g. operating-room nurse, intensive-care nurse, pediatric nurse, etc.

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**Primary equipment used** Catheters; cleaning equipment and chemicals; masks; medical supplies (syringes, needles, bandages, gauze, sterile pads, scalpels, plaster dressings, etc.); monitoring equipment; sterilization equipment; stethoscope; sphygmomanometer; thermometers; watch

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**Workplaces where the occupation is common** Various wards of hospitals and other health care institutions

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**References** Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 4th Ed., ILO, Geneva, 1998, Vol.3, Chapter 97.



Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 3rd Ed., ILO, Geneva, 1983, Vol.2, p. 1480 - 1482; 1528.

Occupational Disease - a Guide to their Prevention. DHEW- NIOSH Pub. 77-181,1977 (Multiple pages - see entry "Nurses" in index).

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