



EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERIES

Medication Errors Checklist: Prevention and Response

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Before you administer medication to a patient, check and verify the following*:

- Right patient: Identify patients by name and one other personal identifier, such as date of birth. Never use room or space number, as those can change.
- Right drug
- Right dose
- Right route
- Right time/frequency
- Check weight
- Check indication
- Check allergies
- Check labs
- Check clinical considerations, such as potential drug-drug interactions, drug-diet interactions and drug-disease interactions

*Note: The 5 “rights” are typically the nurse’s responsibility, while the 5 “checks” are the pharmacy’s responsibility. Merge the two together into 1 checklist if you don’t have a separate pharmacy.

When communicating medication information between physicians, staff, pharmacy and patients:

- Develop a formalized method of communicating drug orders at your facility.
- The person receiving the drug order must write down the order (patient, drug, route, frequency, indication) and read it back to the physician who gave the order, not repeat back what they heard.
- The physician giving the drug order must listen to the order read back (not repeated back) to him and wait until it’s clear that the person receiving the order understands it.
- Conduct handoff communication, including drug history and orders, in the presence of the patient, not in a separate room.
- Using the “teach-back” method, have patients teach their medication-related instructions back to caregivers to make sure they understand.

When a wrong-dose, wrong-drug or wrong-patient error has been made:

- Assess the patient for adverse effects/reactions.
- Notify the physician of the error and the patient’s condition. Get orders for any corrective care and treat the patient.
- Document exactly what happened in the medical record. Focus on facts: answer the what, where and when questions.
- Notify facility leadership and the risk management or patient safety department of the error.
- Disclose the error. As a team, tell the patient what happened, apologize sincerely and explain your strategies for preventing future mistakes.
- Fill out a safety report and any other practice documentation required. This process will address the how and why surrounding the event. Consider sharing the report with national patient safety organizations.
- Consult with any state reporting requirements; some states require you to report medication errors within a certain amount of time.