



Holiday Season Checklist for Practice Closures



As medical practices get ready to close their doors for the holidays, it's important that leaders take the necessary steps to prepare their operations for time away from the office. By completing each of the actions outlined in the following checklist, practice leaders can better protect themselves against undue risk and liability this holiday season while continuing to provide patients with the high-quality care they expect.

- Post signage at the practice entryway, reception desk, waiting rooms, and exam rooms regarding holiday hours. Make sure this signage includes the day and time offices will reopen for normal patient care hours.
- If your practice has a website and patient portal, post a banner or some other pop-out notification regarding holiday hours and office closures.
- Inform patients that messages/refill requests will not be addressed until the practice reopens after the holidays. Be sure to include the messaging, "if this is an emergency, call 911" on all closure communications.
- Plan a brief pre-holiday/post-holiday "huddle" with on-call care providers. Discuss patients who may be at higher risk of an escalation or worsening of a condition. After the holidays, providers should debrief the events of the long weekend and let the team know of any issues and situations encountered over the holiday which need quick follow-up and/or an appointment.
- During the holidays, be mindful of patient privacy when communicating with patients in the presence of others. The rules of patient privacy and security remain the same when communicating with patients when you are away from the healthcare setting.
- When calling the office telephone number, prompts should inform the patient what to do in emergent and urgent situations. If non-emergent, it should provide the patient with instructions of how to access the provider on-call.
- Voicemail message should inform the patient not to leave a message on practice's voicemail when the office is closed for an extended timeframe. Advise the patient to call back during next opened business day.
- When an answering service is used, the office should review patient calls to ensure appropriate follow up occurs. The list of patient calls should be sent to the office for review upon reopening of the practice.
- All communications with patients during extended office closure should be documented in the medical record.
- Document any handoff communication between on-call providers for high-risk patients.

The opinions, recommendations, and information provided herein are not intended as legal advice and are not intended to encompass every consideration you may give to dealing with developing policies/procedures related to this topic. We have found that the use of such information may reduce the risk of medical malpractice claims and/or undesired outcomes and we hope you find it useful, but we cannot guarantee that following this advice will prevent a claim against or negative outcome for you or your practice. This document is not intended to and does not establish "standards of care" as that term might be used in the medicolegal context.