

Are you at-risk if you hand out over-the-counter drugs to employees?

Question: "Is it OK to keep medicine on-hand to give employees as needed (e.g., Advil, Tylenol, Excedrin, Motrin)? I keep these meds on my desk (as do a lot of other assistants at my company) and give them to anyone who needs them. It's faster than employees walking to our on-site health center to request something for a headache. My husband's company has stopped keeping meds like this in its first-aid kits because of liability reasons (in case someone takes something they are allergic to). If we (assistants) continue to keep meds on-hand, do we need a sign-out sheet before giving these meds to employees?" — Lisa

Comments

Our Company has discontinued carrying this type of medication for liability reasons . . . however, people in my office keep a small supply of these medications in their desks for personal use. I believe that people who require medications should provide for their own needs . . . who better to know what they are allergic to then the person who is taking the medication.

Posted by: | January 04, 2008 at 01:42 PM

Most standard first aid kits - which all offices should have as required by their worker's compensation carrier - do have some meds like this. You might want to ask your HR manager a) if you have one of these and, if so, b) does the company assume the liability.

It's unfortunate that if someone takes a med they asked for and received from someone else and has a reaction, their first inclination is to point the finger at the person who was just trying to help. But "it is what it is" and, as such, it's better not to dispense meds to avoid any problems.

As an aside, if you take Px medication, ALWAYS have the bottle it came in with you - even if it's just cough medicine. This is especially critical where random drug screening is done.

Posted by: Cindy Brock | January 04, 2008 at 02:12 PM

At our workplace employees carry their own supply of what they need. If you do choose to provide "popular" OTC meds I would steer clear of things like benadryl because it recommends not driving a vehicle etc. and how "legally" would they get home from work. I know that's an issue if you then let them drive home. We had an employee who developed hives here and instead of giving her benadryl HR decided "legally" we were better off sending her home even though she and HR just wanted to give her benadryl!!!

Posted by: Jocelyn | January 04, 2008 at 02:22 PM

Medicines are given to help people, but all medications can have side effects. When a person takes the wrong amount of a medicine for their size, gender, age, or specific body chemistry, adverse reactions can occur. Some people have or lack certain enzymes that affect drug activity. Some drugs affect the activity of other drugs when given in combination. I would strongly discourage dispensing any type of meds in the workplace.

Posted by: | January 04, 2008 at 04:31 PM

I believe that this is a great concern. Imagine what would happen if someone died because of over the counter drugs provided to them by their employer or co-workers especially not knowing the employee allergic reactions not to mention if they are undercover drug users. You just never can be to safe even with this practice.

Posted by: | January 07, 2008 at 08:39 AM

This was a big deal in my agency some years ago. At one time we were purchasing OTC pain medicines for employees. When our CEO was informed of this practice, the legal issues came to light. All meds on site were flushed away...with witnesses, signatures, the whole nine yards!
Although it's a hassle, I'd suggest staying only with your practice of having employees getting their meds from your health center or have them bring in their own. I really would not recommend dispensing them from your desk.

Posted by: | January 07, 2008 at 11:13 AM

Our company also discontinued stocking and dispensing these types of medication because of liability issues. Since your company has an on-site health center, employees should be directed to use it. People in my office take care of their own medical needs - both prescription & non-prescription. Although you may want to help your coworkers, you should not be giving any kind of medication to anybody but yourself.

Posted by: Anon | January 07, 2008 at 05:44 PM

We are in the process at the organization that I work for, developing a Universal Health and Medication Dispensing Policy and Procedure Manual. I work for a Park District and many times parents send medications with children and there have been an instance where the child has shared medicines with other children. Of course after staff learned about the situation we noticed that there was nothing put in place that said putting "Tylenol in your child's book bag was not acceptable" but we learn from mistakes, which have gotten us to develop a committee and put procedures in place. VERY GOOD TOPIC!

Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 01:33 PM

It seems foolish to dispense any kind of medication, especially if it's only to provide convenience to an employee, even if it is OTC. Some companies do provide first aid kits for emergencies but that should be the extent of it. Other than that, it seems like the company and individuals dispensing medicine are placing

themselves in a risky position unnecessarily.

Posted by: Anita T. | January 11, 2008 at 01:37 PM

I have almost every type of headache, sinus, and cold remedy there is. They are all in my credenza. Anyone on the staff knows they are welcome to stop by and take something without asking. That way, we are able to help the person who needs a quick Excedrin, for example, but it is not officially sponsored by the company so there is no corporate liability issues.

Posted by: Mark | January 11, 2008 at 01:48 PM

Our company has a policy that we cannot keep over-the-counter or Rx meds at work UNLESS in their original container (some would bring in a Ziploc bag). I keep a small container in my desk for my personal need. As a general rule, we are encouraged NOT to share meds with any co-worker for reasons mentioned in the other posts. Our Human Resources office is the only place where a first aid kit is kept. Our company does not provide meds to associates. It safeguards the company from liability. Basically, if you need it/use it, you supply it.

Posted by: Holly | January 11, 2008 at 02:10 PM

Are you a pharmacist? Are you licensed to dispense medication? If not, I would not be providing medication to staff. Even if the practice of allowing a person to get meds off your desk is not "officially sponsored" by the company, by allowing the practice they are condoning it.

Posted by: Karen | January 11, 2008 at 02:16 PM

This note is for Mark: take everything out of your credenza, and get rid of them. Do not dispense any meds: you are not a health professional. Even though it is not "official" you & your company are condoning the dispensing of meds and you will have liability issues if somebody has an extreme reaction to any of the meds. Just because a person has not had an adverse reaction to a medicine in the past does not mean that they will never have a reaction.

Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 03:22 PM

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Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 03:23 PM

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Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 03:23 PM

I think we're all being a bit reactionary here. There is nothing wrong with having over the counter meds in the office unless you are either not keeping them in their original containers or you are tying your employees to their chairs and force feeding them the meds.

If you are going to worry about liability because an adult chose to consume something they are allergic to, you need to go take all the Snickers bars out of the snack machines because someone who is allergic to peanuts might decide to eat one, and you need to take the sugar out of the coffee station just in case a diabetic decides to make their coffee extra sweet.

Posted by: Lisa | January 11, 2008 at 04:01 PM

Lisa, you've missed the point here. Your company has an on-site health center precisely to provide deal with employee medical issues. Some people may find it "inconvenient" to go there. That's their problem. Your company actually provides a wonderful service by having an on-site health center, and employees should be encouraged to use it. And you should not give any meds to anybody. Your coworkers should be responsible for their own meds.

Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 04:53 PM

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Posted by: Anon | January 11, 2008 at 05:09 PM