

Section: UTMB On-line Documentation	01.04-Policy
Subject: Healthcare Epidemiology Policies and Procedures	8.5.24- Revised
Topic: 01.04 - Care and Monitoring of Refrigerators and Freezers	1979 - Author

01.04 - Care and Monitoring of Refrigerators and Freezers

Purpose	To assure that refrigerators and freezers are clean, contents are properly stored, and the temperatures are monitored.
Audience	All employees of UTMB hospitals, clinics and outpatient surgical centers and contract workers.
Cleaning	All refrigerators/freezers should be cleaned regularly and as necessary for spills. Staff utilizing refrigerator/freezers for patient care should ensure their cleanliness and contact the appropriate departments to clean and disinfect as needed. Regular cleaning of patient accessible refrigerator/freezers is a shared responsibility between food and nutrition and environmental services.
Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refrigerators designated as shared patient and family refrigerators that are used by multiple patients and/or families should contain only food that is sealed in an airtight container that has not been inside the patient's room. • Galley refrigerators that are maintained by the food and nutrition department should contain only food that has been prepared by the food and nutrition department or food brought in for patients that is pre-packaged, unopened, and has not been inside the patient's room. • Food items designated for a specific patient should be labeled with that patient's name and the date that it was placed in the refrigerator. • It is recommended that food be discarded on a regular schedule of every 2 days and/or when the food is past the printed expiration date. • Food for employees shall not be stored in the patient food refrigerator. • Medicine or drug refrigerators should be kept solely for the purpose of storing medications that require refrigeration according to manufacturer's instructions. Beer ordered for a specific patient may be stored in the medication refrigerator. • Refrigerators and freezer for storage of breast milk, should only contain breast milk. • Refrigerators for storage of blood should contain only blood and blood products. • Specimen refrigerators should contain only specimens which are properly secured and appropriately labeled (i.e., with the patient's name, unit number, and date).
Monitoring and Logging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An accurately calibrated thermometer or digital probe must be kept in each refrigerator and freezer at all times. Temperatures are tracked to ensure appropriate temperatures are maintained. There are 2 options for monitoring temperatures in refrigerators and freezers, manual or digital. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Manual monitoring</u>: The temperature of any refrigerator or freezer that contains drugs, patient food, breast milk, blood or specimens can be checked, and logged daily to ensure proper temperature control. Logs

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that are needed for food, drugs, or specimens can be downloaded from the following hyperlink:

<http://intranet.utmb.edu/qhs/TheJointCommission/default.asp>

2. Digital monitoring: The temperature of any refrigerator or freezer that contains drugs, patient food, breast milk, blood or specimens can be monitored with a digital monitoring system that monitors temperatures in refrigerators and freezers at maximum of 15-minute intervals continuously.

- A notification system is defined by management of clinical areas.
- If temperatures register above or below the appropriate range, all stored items shall be removed, placed in a working unit and those items marked “quarantined”. Determine the viability of the items and discard nonviable items or return to use viable items. To determine viability, refer to the consulting departments below. Be prepared to report maximum or minimum temperature ranges and the time out of range.
 - Breast milk (Nursing)
 - Blood and blood products (Blood Bank)
 - Medications (Pharmacy/Manufacturer)
 - Specimens (Lab Reference Guide or Laboratory)
 - Food (Food and Nutrition)
- Damaged blood and blood products will be returned to the Blood Bank and damaged medications will be returned to the Pharmacy for proper disposal. Damaged specimens will be sent to the appropriate clinical laboratory to be discarded. When food refrigerators or freezers fail, spoiled food will be discarded appropriately.
- Any issues with the refrigerator and freezers such as leaks, ice buildup or out of range temperature, reach out to the UTMB’s Service Response Center at 409-772-4040 to place a service ticket. For out-of-range temperatures on manual documented refrigerators or freezers, staff shall document in the “actions taken” section of the manual form.
- Areas that are not open 24/7 will have a method in place to record temperature during non-clinic hours. The temperature will be checked for that time frame upon return.
- The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) requires any refrigerator or freezer that contains DSHS vaccines has a digital recorder that displays outside the unit and has a separate probe in a buffered medium. Temperatures must be checked and documented twice daily, and the minimum and maximum temperatures reviewed and documented in the morning each business day.

Responsibility

- Patient nourishment refrigerators shall be monitored by Food & Nutrition Services.
- Medication refrigerators shall be monitored by Pharmacy or staff responsible for ensuring the viability of its contents.
- Blood and blood product refrigerators shall be monitored by Blood Bank Services.
- Specimen refrigerators shall be monitored by laboratory services or staff responsible for ensuring the integrity of its contents.

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- Breast milk refrigerators shall be monitored by Nursing Services.

Temperatures

- The temperature of patient food refrigerators must be kept between 33° F to 40° F (1° C to 4° C) and freezers at or below 20° F (-7° C).
- The temperatures at which drugs are usually refrigerated should be maintained thermostatically between 36° F to 46° F (2° C to 8° C) and freezers at temperatures between 5° F (-15° C) to -58° F (-50° C). Room temperature medications are to be maintained between 59° F (15° C) to 86° F (30° C).
- Blood is to be kept between 34° F to 43° F (1° C to 6° C), and antisera between 36° F to 46° F (2° to 8° C).
- Frozen specimens must be maintained less than 5° F (-15° C). Refrigerated specimens must be maintained between 36° F (2° C) to 46° F (8° C)
- Breast milk must be stored at or below a temperature of 40° F (4° C).

References

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