

Section: UTMB On-line Documentation	01.04-Policy
Subject: Healthcare Epidemiology Policies and Procedures	2.13.2025 - 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 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. The temperature of any refrigerator or freezer that contains drugs, food stored by food and nutrition department, breast milk, blood, specimens or reagents must be monitored manually or electronically and documented at least daily based on requirements set by the items stored. Logs that are needed for food, drugs, or specimens can

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be downloaded from the following hyperlink:

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

- A notification system, including notification timing is defined by management of clinical areas, based on the items being stored.
- If temperatures register above or below the appropriate range, investigate the cause of the temperature deviation and address simple issues (open door, unplugged). Collaborate as needed with the consulting departments below, to determine the viability of the stored items. Determine appropriate actions, which may include discarding compromised items, quarantining for further evaluation, or continuing use based on professional judgement and duration of the temperature excursion.
- Food storage devices may be placed “out of order,” with contents removed by nursing or may be quarantined until disposition is determined by Food and Nutrition Services.
- 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 and reagents (Lab Reference Guide or Laboratory)
 - Food (Food and Nutrition/ Nursing)
- 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.

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- 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.
 - 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 (0.6°C to 4.4°C) and freezers at or below 20°F (-6.7°C).
 - The temperatures at which drugs are usually refrigerated should be maintained thermostatically between 36°F to 46°F (2.2°C to 7.8°C) and freezers at temperatures between 5°F to -58°F (-15°C to -50°C). Room temperature medications are to be maintained between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C).
 - Blood is to be kept between 34°F to 43°F (1.1°C to 6.1°C), and antisera between 36°F to 46°F (2.2°C to 7.8°C).
 - Frozen specimens must be maintained at less than 5°F (-15°C). Refrigerated specimens must be maintained between 36°F to 46°F (2.2°C to 7.8°C)
 - Breast milk must be stored at or below a temperature of 40° F (4.4°C).

- Personal Use Refrigerators in Patient Rooms**
- Refrigerators placed in patient rooms for personal use by patients and family visitors will be managed as below.
1. Refrigerators will contain a manual thermometer.
 2. Refrigerators will be emptied of all contents by EVS staff when a patient is discharged or transferred out of the room. The EVS staff will wipe down the inside and outside of the refrigerator with an approved disinfectant.
 3. The refrigerators will be inspected by the Property Services department every 6 months to ensure that the refrigerators are functioning properly, e.g. temperature is maintained within 33-40° F range, there is no water leakage, and doors close properly
 4. Patients will be educated about the personal use of the refrigerator as below:
 - Breast milk and patient medications will not be stored in the refrigerator.
 - Patient food items will not be stored unless approved by the nursing team.

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- Perishable food items will not be stored for more than 24 hours. Patients and families will be responsible for discarding the stored items.
 - If abnormal temperature or other malfunctions of the refrigerator are observed, the nurse should be notified.
5. If a refrigerator malfunction is observed by the nursing staff, Property Services department should be notified for inspection and follow up plan.

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