

Definition of significant risk for general practices

Australian general practices generally do not pose a significant risk of harm to patients. However, from time to time, lapses and errors may occur that result in an increased risk of harm to patients accessing care from a general practice.

A significant risk is one where there is a high probability of a substantial and demonstrable serious adverse impact for patients who access care from the general practice.

In each case, a significant risk will be sufficiently serious to warrant an immediate response to reduce the risk to patients (see table of examples below). This may include interventions or changes to the general practice’s policies, procedures, or management systems; the clinical care environment; or clinical practice.

Risks that have already been identified by the general practice, such as those identified through the review of a near miss or critical incident, and which are subject to existing quality improvement plans and effectively mitigated, would not be considered a significant risk for the purposes of [Advisory GP18/04: Notification of significant risk](#) (Advisory GP18/04).

Significant risks for the purposes of Advisory GP18/04 are those risks that at the time of the assessment have not previously been identified by the general practice; are systemic in their origin; are not currently controlled; or have not been sufficiently mitigated to prevent the possibility of serious patient harm.

Assessors and/or accrediting agencies can use the following sample risk matrix to help determine if an identified risk/s of patient harm constitutes a significant risk/s as defined by Advisory GP18/04.

Table A2.1: Risk analysis matrix

Likelihood	Consequences				
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Extreme
Rare	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High
Unlikely	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Very high
Possible	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Very high
Likely	Medium	High	Very high	Very high	Extreme
Almost certain	Medium	Very high	Very high	Extreme	Extreme

Low risk	Manage by routine procedures.
Medium risk	Manage by specific monitoring or audit procedures.
High risk	This is serious and must be addressed immediately.
Very high risk	The magnitude of the consequences of an event, should it occur, and the likelihood of that event occurring, are assessed in the context of the effectiveness of existing strategies and controls.
Extreme risk	

Source: *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infections in Health Care* (Table A2.1)

The following list provides some examples of significant risks for general practices. They are intended to be examples only. This list is not exhaustive and should not be exclusively used to identify significant risks.

Examples of significant risks in a general practice may include, but are not limited to:

Risks	Impact	Reporting
Staff do not use processes to correctly identify a patient before care is administered	Patients are misidentified and receive incorrect procedures	Health Care Complaints Commission
Staff do not perform processes for correctly cleaning, disinfecting, and sterilising reusable medical devices to the required standard	Patients are exposed to blood-borne viral infections through direct contact	Health Care Complaints Commission
Staff do not store medications in a secure location	Patients inappropriately access controlled medicines and experience an adverse reaction	Health Care Complaints Commission
Staff do not follow processes for managing temperature-sensitive medications and vaccines	Patients are given ineffective vaccines and require re-vaccination	Local jurisdictional Public Health Unit
Doctors do not follow processes to check and follow up clinically significant test results	Patients do not receive necessary follow-up care and experience deterioration of health	Health Care Complaints Commission

The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009* (the National Law) requires registered health practitioners, employers and education providers to report to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) any instances of 'notifiable conduct' by individual registered health practitioners. Notifiable conduct by individual registered health practitioners does not fall under the definition of significant risk for the purposes of Advisory GP18/04 and is not required to be reported to the Commission or the relevant state or territory health care complaints body. Assessors and/or accrediting agencies that observe any conduct by individual registered health practitioners that constitutes notifiable conduct during an assessment are required to follow the mandatory reporting processes as outlined by AHPRA.