What is the CMS requirement for fire drills in healthcare facilities?

THE DIRECT ANSWER

CMS requires fire drills at least quarterly on each shift , held at unexpected times under varying conditions — enforced through the adopted NFPA 101-2012 (§§18.7.1.4–18.7.1.7 for new and 19.7.1.4–19.7.1.7 for existing health care occupancies) and surveyed under K-tag K-712. Drills must include transmission of the fire alarm signal and simulation of emergency fire conditions, and they're consistently among the top-10 national life safety citations — almost always for predictable patterns , not missed drills.

THE REQUIREMENTS IN DETAIL

- Frequency: at least quarterly on each shift — every shift, every quarter, no exceptions.
- Timing: unexpected times, varying conditions. Drills that always happen Tuesday at 10 AM fail the "unexpected" test.
- Signal: transmission of the fire alarm signal with simulation of emergency conditions. Between 9:00 PM and 6:00 AM, a coded announcement may substitute for audible alarms.
- Leadership: responsibility for planning and conducting drills assigned only to competent, qualified persons.
- Staff knowledge: staff must be familiar with procedures and understand that drills are part of the established routine.

WHY FACILITIES KEEP GETTING CITED

- K-712 citations rarely mean "no drills." They mean the drill log shows a pattern: same day, same time, same shift rotation every quarter. Surveyors check that drill times vary by at least an hour and span different days.

FIELD QUESTION

How often are fire drills required in hospitals?

At least quarterly on each shift, at unexpected times under varying conditions (NFPA 101-2012, enforced by CMS).

From Healthcare Facility Hub - free, like everything on the site. The full article is at the link below.

Caution: codes, editions, and targets vary by facility and authority having jurisdiction (AHJ). Figures marked as common practice are facility targets, not code requirements. Confirm against your AHJ and the current code text before acting.