

Fact Sheet



Division of Developmental Disabilities Health Care Services

Wheelchair Safety

Safety Information Fact Sheet #1

Wheelchair Safety: Includes the proper operation and maintenance of wheelchairs and other mobility assistive devices to prevent injury. Unsafe maintenance and operation of these devices can result in serious injury to the member and their caregivers.

Fact Sheet guidelines have been provided as general information, not as a substitution for medical treatment from a physician.



Did you know?

- Injuries from unsafe operation and maintenance of wheelchairs and other mobility assistive devices (*scooters, walkers, bath chairs, etc.*) can be serious, possibly life-threatening.
- Mobility assistive device injuries can be prevented.

Risk Factors:

That can cause injury:

- Faulty brakes
- Broken/missing parts
- Missing anti-tip bar
- Worn wheels & tires
- Curbs, ramps, inclines & stairs
- Uneven pavement & slippery floors
- Tight/close bathroom quarters unsafe transfers, tips & falls
- Inappropriate use (*leg rest, door stop, step ladder, cart, etc.*)
- Unsecured safety belt
- Others riding on the device
- Heavy items hung on the device
- Driving with a device unsecured

Be alert!

- Always be alert to potential mobility assistive device hazards for all members - even those operating independently

Prevention:

- Repair or replace faulty or missing parts — especially brakes.
- Do not use a mobility assistive device to hold open a door or as a foot rest.
- Utilize anti-tip bars found across the back of the wheelchair or device.
- Avoid hanging any items in the back of the wheelchair or device - reaching for items and/or heavy loads can cause tipping.
- Assist and monitor all individuals members near curbs, inclines and/or ramps.
- Make sure to center the device when going up and down ramps or uneven surfaces to avoid tipping forward or to the side.
- Ensure the device is properly secured during transport with four-point tie-downs.
- Remove and store add-on equipment prior to transport, i.e. oxygen tanks, tray storage bags, etc.

Equal Opportunity Employer / Program • Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities • To request this document in alternative format or for further information about this policy, contact the Division of Developmental Disabilities Customer Service Center at 1-844-770-9500; TTY/TDD Services: 7-1-1

Wheelchair Safety Tips



Wheelchair Transfers:

- Always apply *all* brakes and test them.
- Apply an anti-tip bar (*if available*).
- Ensure that the chair, bed, or other location is secure - does not slide.
- Make sure the member is not restrained by a belt and/or clothing.
- Use a gait belt, especially when performing a one-person transfer.
- Move the member from a high to low position whenever possible.
 - If transferring from a bed to a wheelchair, the bed should be positioned higher.
 - Use a Hoyer lift and/or two or more person lifts when needed.
- Whenever in doubt, seek assistance or two-person transfer.
- Use good body posture when assisting with a transfer.

Additional Mobility Tips:

- Ensure electric mobility assistive devices are fully charged prior to use in the community.
- Keep traffic areas and pathways clear of clutter and debris.
- Be Respectful: The member uses an assistive device for mobility.
 - Maintain appropriate distance and respect as you would for the actual person: do not push on their mobility device, lean on it, or tap on it.
 - Always transport the member with care, facing forward, and speaking directly to the member.
 - Do not have anyone ride on the device with the member.
 - Do not inappropriately utilize the device as a door stop, foot stool, cart, "joy-riding", etc.
 - Do not hang items such as backpacks and/or purses on the back of the device or place them on the member's lap during transport.
 - Handle and maintain the mobility assistive device with care and respect.
 - Educate the member on the safety and maintenance requirements for the assistive mobility device.



Emergency

Immediately call 9-1-1 when an injury results in any of the following conditions:

- *Difficulty Breathing*
- *Bleeding*
- *Loss of Consciousness*
- *Excessive Pain*
- *Inability to Move the Injured Body Part*

The Wheelchair Safety Fact Sheet is in a series of *Health Information Fact Sheets* compiled by DDD Health Care Services. Issued October 2012; Reviewed/Revised April 2025.