



## Health & Safety Alert #20-2-03

### Falls

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The MUI data reveals that 43 percent of all injuries reported as MUIs are a result of a fall. There are numerous other falls without injury or only minor injury that also occur and result in an unusual incident. Falls are a significant issue for individuals with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, and each fall has the potential of resulting in serious harm.

#### **Known Facts on Falls:**

- Most falls occur when individuals are going about their usual activities of daily living.
- Individuals with a disability may not have the protective reactions to prevent serious injuries when they fall.
- Advanced age and medical condition(s) may increase the possibility of injury due to a fall.
- The more falls an individual has, the greater the chance of injury.
- There are risk factors that increase the probability of an individual falling.

#### ***Individual Risk Factors***

There are particular conditions that an individual may have or exhibit which are unique to the individual. These factors include but are not limited to:

- a) Lower extremity weakness, upper extremity, or one sided muscle weakness
- b) Balance disorders
- c) Visual deficits
- d) Use of sedative – hypnotic medications; use of four or more medications
- e) Functional and cognitive impairments
- f) Psychotropic medications
- g) Age
- h) Seizure disorder
- i) Chronic or acute pain
- j) Cardiac medication that results in positional blood pressure changes

### ***Environmental Risk Factors***

These are factors related to the environment or environmental conditions. These factors include but are not limited to:

- a) Poor lighting
- b) Slippery floor surfaces or changes in floor surface (e.g., from carpet to tile)
- c) Transfers/pivots
- d) Stairs - Lack of handrails
- e) Wires, light cords or other objects in the environment or on the floor which an individual can trip on/over
- f) Ill-fitting or untied shoes or ill-fitting pants
- g) The use of adaptive devices
- h) Uneven walking surfaces
- i) Getting on and off of vehicles
- j) Weather conditions such as ice and rain
- k) Spills or clutter

The MUI review showed the following were the most frequent locations for falls:

- a) Bathrooms and bedrooms
- b) Stairs, including those on buses and vans
- c) Falls from one's wheelchair
- d) Doorways

Common causes included:

- a) Tripping over objects on the floor
- b) Losing balance during transfer pivots and turns
- c) Medical conditions that the person has
- d) Water/urine on the floor

## ***Falls Prevention***

Falls should be reviewed any time there is an injury that results in the need for medical care, and at least annually as part of the ISP process for individuals with a history of falls in the past year. The first step in prevention is to understand why the person is falling. The review should include a history of fall circumstances and identification of possible internal and external risk factors. A professional assessment by a nurse, physician, and physical therapist/occupational therapist of medications, acute or chronic medical problems, vision, mobility levels, and balance will help identify potential risk factors.

Specific recommendations would be based on the findings of the review and assessment but could include:

- Professional evaluation of mobility skills
- Review of medication for those on sedating medications or four or more medications
- Exercise program for lower extremity weakness, poor grip strength, balance problems
- Modification or correction of environmental risk factors
- Treatment of medical problems
- Use of mechanical support devices for assistance with ambulation
- Training of staff
- A determination that the risk of injury from falls is greater than alternative ambulation or mobility options

It is important to realize that any fall has the potential to result in serious harm. Risk factors for falls should be clearly explained to individuals or their guardians along with the benefits or potential risk of any alternative interventions.

*Please make sure that your staff are informed of this information to prevent future injuries to MRDD consumers.*

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.