



Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care  
a core program of PMHCC, Inc.

Empowerment through  
education, **support** and advocacy



# Safety Reminders

**People** with intellectual disabilities, like the general population, are at increased risk for injury as they age. They also may be at increased risk due to changes in physical and mental health status. Recent hospitalizations, illnesses, sensory changes (e.g., vision, hearing and touch sensitivity), medication changes, and changes in ambulatory status may be reason for concern. It is important that these issues be evaluated frequently to encourage good safety practices and ensure that individual needs are met. There are many ways to enhance safety for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This publication shares a few ideas.

## Environmental Safety

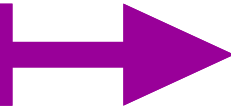
Suggestions for maintaining safety at home...

- ✓ Maintain a clutter-free environment (including the bathroom)
- ✓ Use the brightest bulbs possible and strive for consistent lighting from room to room (as part of the aging process, our eyes lose the ability to react to lighting changes)
- ✓ Keep floors smooth and non-slippery with no scattered rugs, torn linoleum, torn carpeting, or loose flooring
- ✓ Consider the placement of toilet paper (reachable without stretching, twisting or moving to one side of the commode)
- ✓ Use a color bathtub mat (that contrasts with the color of the tub)
- ✓ Determine if a shower chair or stool may be beneficial
- ✓ Consider a raised toilet seat with arms or grab bars by the toilet
- ✓ Water temperature may not exceed 120°F in bathtubs and showers (be sure to have a plan for routine checks and documentation)
- ✓ Outside walkways and stairs need to be kept clear (e.g., leaves, snow, and ice) and wooden ramps should use non-slip paint or adhesive non-skid strips
- ✓ Flashlight batteries should be checked frequently



Learn more at [www.pchc.org](http://www.pchc.org)

## Grab Bars!!



Grab bars can be installed in various places to meet a person's needs. To assure appropriate equipment and proper placement, a physical therapist or occupational therapist should be consulted for an in-home evaluation. For participants of a Managed Care Organization (MCO), the Special Needs Unit of the MCO may be contacted to determine if an in-home evaluation will be covered and how to obtain the evaluation. This is true for both Medicaid and Medicare MCOs. Contact information is available in the Special Needs Units brochure on the PCHC website at <http://www.pchc.org> or at <http://www.pchc.org/Projects/PDFs/Special-Needs-Unit-Brochure.pdf>

### A few details to remember...

- Grab bars can meet many needs but must be individualized to be most effective
- Different types of grab bars, and placement of grab bars, meet specific individual needs (e.g., one person may need a vertical bar to climb into and out of a bathtub while another person may require an angled bar)
- Towel bars should never be used as a grab bars (if someone is using a towel bar as a grab bar, consider having it replaced)
- An elevated toilet seat with bars may benefit some individuals
- Grab bars must be mounted securely (if inadequate anchors are used, they will not remain secure)
- Grab bars need to be evaluated routinely for sturdiness and safety and loose bars must be repaired promptly

## Hazardous Materials



In general, cleaning supplies (poisonous supplies) need to be labeled and kept in a safe place. They may be kept unlocked if all people who live in a home are able to safely use or avoid poisonous materials. Documentation of each individual's ability to safely use or avoid poisonous materials must be maintained in each individual's assessment.

Remember that cleaning supplies may be toxic if ingested and if inhaled (odors may affect a person's respiratory status).

It is of utmost importance to be diligent in evaluating the environment to promote safety and prevent injury. The environment may need to be changed frequently based on changes in the physical and mental health status of the people supported.

## Fire Drills

Fire drills should be conducted routinely to assure the best possible outcome in the event of a fire.

### A few details to remember...

- Fire drills need to be conducted at least once every calendar month at random times (i.e., different times of day and night, different days of the week)
- Fire drills should not be conducted at change of shift when additional staff are available
- Alternate exit routes need to be used
- Is there a designated area? Is there more than one?

Contact the local fire department, using a non-emergency number, to talk about the needs of people who live in the home. Representatives of the local fire department will be able to help in the development of a plan.



# Safety Checks



Does your agency have a safety procedure or check list? Safety checks are imperative and are everyone's responsibility. Below are some questions that should be considered when developing a check list.

- ✓ How often is a walk-through done at the home?
- ✓ Does it include wheelchair safety checks? See PCHC's *The Wheelchair Guide* at <http://www.pchc.org/Documents/Publications/PDFs/The-Wheelchair-Guide-Brochure.pdf>
- ✓ Are stairways in good condition? Outside walkways and stairs in good condition (level, no cracks/crevices)? Are stairway railings (outside and inside) stable? Are grab bars anchored and stable?
- ✓ How often are vehicles checked? Are seat belts working? Are people able to enter and exit safely?

## Post Important Numbers

Post a list of local emergency services numbers next to the telephone or in your cell phone. Be sure to include numbers for the Fire Department, Poison Control, Police and Ambulance Service. Contact the local fire department using a non-emergency number to explain the needs of people in the home in case of an emergency.

## Links to Resources



Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care's (PCHC) Website  
[www.pchc.org](http://www.pchc.org)

Intellectual Disabilities Licensing Information, Bureau of Human Services Licensing  
<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/provider/longtermcareservices/>

*Campaign Guide -- A Fire Safety Campaign for People 50-Plus*  
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-288-508.pdf>

*Check for Safety -- A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults*, Department of Health and Human Services  
[http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/pubs/English/booklet\\_Eng\\_desktop-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/pubs/English/booklet_Eng_desktop-a.pdf)

*Learn About Fire Escape Plans*, US Fire Administration, FEMA  
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/campaigns/smokealarms/escapeplans/index.shtm>

*Check for Safety -- A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults*  
<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/checklistforsafety.html>

Consumer Product Safety Commission, Safety for Older Consumers – Home Safety Checklist  
<http://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/122038/701.pdf>

Grab Bars, Cornell University, Joan and Sanford I. Weill Medical College  
[http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/handouts/grab\\_bars.pdf](http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/handouts/grab_bars.pdf)

Project Gem, Bathroom and Grab Bar Safety  
[http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/GEM\\_Bathroom\\_and\\_Grab\\_Bar\\_Safety\\_Workshop\\_2012.pdf](http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/GEM_Bathroom_and_Grab_Bar_Safety_Workshop_2012.pdf)