

SAFETY ALERT

WHEELCHAIR-RELATED HARM



This alert was prompted by an event reported to the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Reporting System (PA-PSRS) in 2022 in which a patient's finger was amputated while opening a wheelchair.

Wheelchairs are one of the most common assistive devices used in healthcare facilities, from admission to discharge. They are often found at the entrance of a facility for use by both patients and visitors with mobility issues. Hospital volunteers, transport staff, and clinical staff use wheelchairs to take patients to different care areas to have tests performed. Many facilities require that patients be transported in a wheelchair upon discharge. While risks of falls and injury during transport are commonly recognized, some types of wheelchairs can cause injury when they are being unfolded.

What types of injuries can occur?

- Cut(s)
- Loss of nail(s)
- Broken bone(s)
- Crushing injury
- Loss of finger(s)

What can I do to prevent an injury?

- Research the wheelchair before purchase
- Evaluate the wheelchair for potential hazards
- Read and follow the owner's manual
- Educate staff on proper use of wheelchairs
- Ensure seats are fully engaged before allowing a patient to sit in the wheelchair
- Replace folding wheelchairs with rigid frame wheelchairs that do not fold
- If available, use an anti-fold device
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations on routine inspection and maintenance