

September 2021

Important Information About the Use of Mechanical Lifts

Mechanical lifts are devices used to assist with transfers and movement of individuals who require support for mobility beyond the manual support provided by caregivers alone. They include floor lifts, sit-stand lifts, and ceiling track lift systems.

Providers of OPWDD certified facilities and programs are required to ensure that services and supports, such as use of mechanical lifts, are provided with sufficient safeguards in accordance with individuals' needs. OPWDD recommends that providers implement policies and procedures to ensure those safeguards are properly implemented and updated, as needed, on an ongoing basis.

Policy and Procedures:

When the use of mechanical lifts is required by individuals receiving services, OPWDD recommends that agencies serving those individuals implement policy and procedures in keeping with New York State's Safe Patient Handling Law and guidance issued by the federal Food and Drug Administration (see Resources, below). The law does not apply directly to OPWDD certified community-based programs, but it includes provisions intended to protect individuals and staff, optimize staff training, and ensure proper maintenance and/or replacement of equipment through an ongoing review process.

Policies and procedures should, at minimum, include the following areas addressed in this alert:

- safe mechanical lift operation;
- equipment maintenance;
- staff training; and
- periodic review and revision of the policies and procedures.

Safe Mechanical Lift Operation:

Before the initial and subsequent use of mechanical lift equipment, a safety check should be completed in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines and/or agency protocol to ensure the equipment is in good working order.

The number of staff required to perform a transfer is at the discretion of the practitioner who prescribed or recommended use of a mechanical lift device. However, it is always best practice to use mechanical lift equipment with a minimum of two staff. One staff

September 2021

member's primary role is the operation and movement of the lift equipment. The second staff is primarily responsible for the safe positioning of the individual in the sling or harness system during the transfer. Both staff should continually observe and communicate with each other *and* the individual throughout the transfer.

It is also a best practice that a physical therapist and/or occupational therapist provide training and instruction for appropriate lift operation. Staff should be trained on, familiar with, and follow an individual's safeguarding plan regarding use of lift equipment. The plan must specify the type of lift, the type of sling, and the number of trained staff required for its safe use. All mechanical lifts should be used with appropriate slings and harnesses, in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. There should be a process established to review any needs-based deviations from the manufacturer's instructions.

The policy and procedures should identify the party who staff are required to notify, during regular business hours and off-shift hours, regarding concerns about the status and/or condition and use of the equipment.

The policy and procedures should clarify that lifts are *transfer* devices, not *transport* devices. Staff should limit the individual's time suspended in the lift, completing the transfer safely and efficiently.

The policy should also specify that lift brakes must be engaged when the equipment is parked or charging and not in use.

Equipment Maintenance:

All lift equipment must be maintained on a regular basis according to manufacturer's guidelines to ensure safe function and use. Provider agencies should refer to written manufacturer's guidelines for specific criteria to create and implement tracking tools for preventive maintenance of lift equipment.

The policy and procedures should identify the appropriate parties responsible to monitor and provide the preventive maintenance for lift equipment, repairs, and identification of lifts requiring replacement due to age and function. Manufacturers may recommend use of approved technicians for certain repairs.

If a lift is broken or otherwise compromised and unsafe, it must be immediately removed from service until needed repair is made. Reporting the problem and back-up strategies

September 2021

for transferring individuals when lift equipment is compromised should be part of the response protocol. All electric lifts should always have a charged back-up battery available.

Lift life expectancy and repair logs should be monitored to ensure timely replacement for lifts. Agencies are responsible for replacing lifts that are broken beyond reasonable repair.

Likewise, slings and harnesses used with floor and sit-to-stand lifts must be maintained in good working order. Slings and harnesses should be maintained according to manufacturer's instructions, and any slings or harnesses that are compromised must be immediately removed from service and replaced.

Manufacturer's instructions should be followed regarding cleaning and disinfecting all lift equipment between individual use.

Staff Training:

Staff should be trained in agency policy and procedure regarding safe use of mechanical lift equipment. Accurate training records should be maintained and monitored, according to agency policy and procedure, to ensure all appropriate staff are adequately trained on equipment used to transfer individuals.

Mechanical lift training should include hands-on practice with mentors and/or trained staff and demonstration of competency prior to using lift equipment with individuals receiving services.

Staff should be trained on safe operating procedures including back-up and/or manual transfer procedures if the equipment's electronics or batteries fail.

Staff should be trained to identify when lifts have broken or missing parts or are not functioning in a safe and typical manner. Common repair concerns include, but are not limited to:

- sticky, cracked, or poorly tracking caster wheels
- lift base legs that do not stay open or closed when set in place
- lift actuators that do not smoothly operate up and down
- joints between lift parts that loosen



September 2021

- hangers/cradles that are missing components that were originally provided with the lift at delivery
- hand pendants that do not operate smoothly and/or have exposed wires
- compromised or ill-fitting slings and harnesses

Mechanical Lift Safety Review

The Safe Patient Handling Act requires the establishment of a committee or subcommittee to review the handling and transfers of individuals receiving services. OPWDD recommends that provider agencies establish a process to periodically review the effectiveness of mechanical lift safety practices and revise the safety practices accordingly.

More resources can be found at:

- Public Health Law (PHL) 2997-g (NYS Safe Handling Law) at <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBH/A29-D>
- <https://www.fda.gov/files/medical%20devices/published/Patient-Lifts-Safety-Guide.pdf>