

1. DEVICE/EQUIPMENT:

Bed rails and grab handles used with beds in hospitals or in the community.

2. PROBLEM:

Entrapment and asphyxiation of bed occupants has occurred in gaps present in bed rails and bed grab handles or created by the combination of bed rails or bed grab handles with a bed and mattress.

Bed rails are used extensively in care environments to prevent bed occupants falling out of bed and injuring themselves. They usually achieve this very successfully. However, MHRA and NIAIC continue to receive adverse incident reports of entrapment of bed occupants, which have included fatalities of children and adults.

The most common type of incident reported has involved care home residents becoming entrapped in divan type bed rails or when using a metal framed bed fitted with bed rails from a third party supplier. Inappropriate, incorrect, poorly fitted or poorly maintained bed rails can produce gaps which do not prevent occupants slipping underneath, through or past the bed rail. These gaps can be large enough to allow part of the occupant to slip past or through the bed rail but are not large enough for them to pass fully through to the floor. The occupant then becomes wedged in the gap and, if not found in time, can suffer positional asphyxiation.

Risk assessment is key to ensure safe use. This starts with the bed occupant and includes the combination of the proposed bed rail or bed grab handle, the bed and the mattress (or mattresses where overlays are used). Existing combinations should also be reviewed to ensure that they are compatible with the user, the bed, and are properly fitted and maintained without gaps or traps that may allow an occupant to become entrapped.

The risk assessment is to be repeated if the bed, mattress, bed rail or condition of the occupant changes.

Purchasing procedures should ensure that only appropriate equipment is obtained. These procedures should include experience and knowledge gained from previous risk assessments and use.

ACTION BY:

All those purchasing, supplying, selecting, using and maintaining bed rails and grab handles, especially in the community. This includes nursing staff, care at home staff, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, equipment stores managers and equipment purchasers.

4. ACTION:

This Alert replaces the following safety warnings:

SN 1999(NI)51, HN 2000(NI)17, SN 2001(NI)15, SN 2002(NI)03.

Two updated guidance documents have been produced. The Device Bulletin, DB 2006(06) 'Safe use of bed rails', is a detailed 30 page publication. This is complemented by a poster (size A2), designed for wall display in suitable locations.

Both publications are available free of charge from the MHRA website.

Hyperlinks (in PDF document):

[Device Bulletin DB 2006\(06\), 'Safe use of bed rails'](#), and [Poster, 'Safe use of bed rails'](#)

To navigate from the MHRA home page:

www.mhra.gov.uk > Publications > Safety Guidance > Device Bulletins

www.mhra.gov.uk > Publications > Posters and leaflets

Alternatively e-mail dts@mhra.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 020 7084 3272.

5. ONWARD DISTRIBUTION TO:

Please bring this notice to the attention of all who need to know or be aware of it. This will include distribution to:

- All wards
- Independent Health and Social Care Providers – Private Clinics, Residential and Nursing Homes through RQIA
- Clinical governance leads
- Equipment stores
- Estates departments
- Health and safety managers
- Maintenance staff
- Nursing executive directors
- Occupational therapy managers
- Physiotherapy managers
- Purchasing managers
- Risk managers
- Care management team managers
- Community care staff
- Physical disabilities, respite care, autistic services)
- Equipment stores managers
- Loan store managers
- Occupational therapists
- Children's hospices
- Hospices
- Domiciliary care providers
- Residential special schools

6. CONTACTS:

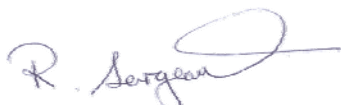
Enquires to NIAIC should quote reference number MDEA(NI)2007/09 and be addressed to:

Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre (NIAIC)
Health Estates
Estate Policy Directorate
Stoney Road
Dundonald
Belfast BT16 1US

Tel: 028 9052 3868
Fax: 028 9052 3900
Email: NIAIC@dhsspsni.gov.uk

7. FEEDBACK:

None



Robert Sergeant
NIAIC Operational Manager

HOW TO REPORT ADVERSE INCIDENTS

Adverse Incidents relating to medical devices, non-medical equipment, plant and buildings should be reported to NIAIC as soon as possible. Advice on how to report is given in MDEA(NI)2006/01. If you are in doubt about how to report incidents, please speak to your liaison officer or contact NIAIC using the telephone number provided. Adverse Incident reporting forms and an on-line reporting facility are available on the NIAIC website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/niaic

Heath Estates is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety