

# Cleaning, Storage and Selection of Mechanical Patient Lifts and Handling Aids

**Note:** Terms in bold are defined in the Definitions section.

If you have any questions or comments contact IPC at [ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca](mailto:ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca).

## Best practice recommendations

### Purpose

- To provide IPC recommendations for the selection, cleaning, and storage of **mechanical patient lifts** and **handling aids** such as slings, transfer belts, sliders, restraints and other related devices.
- To provide best practices for reducing the risk of transmitting infection.

**Note:** Other aspects, not related to IPC such as **patient** safety, staff safety etc., should be assessed by the appropriate staff and programs with the expertise to manage those aspects.

### Application

This recommendation should be followed by all Alberta Health Services (AHS) staff, medical staff, volunteers, students and other persons acting on behalf of AHS.

### Routine practices

#### 1. Routine Practices

1.1 Routine practices are implemented by all healthcare workers to prevent the spread of infections. [Routine Practices](#) include but are not limited to:

- [Hand Hygiene](#)
  - Perform hand hygiene as per AHS Hand Hygiene [Policy](#) and [Procedure](#). Hand hygiene is the most important factor in preventing transmission of microorganisms.
- [Point-of-care risk assessment](#)
  - Perform a point-of-care risk assessment to evaluate the likelihood of exposure to blood and body fluids.
- [Personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)
  - Choose appropriate PPE to minimize the risk of exposure.
- Cleaning and handling of patient-care items and equipment.
  - Regular and ongoing cleaning and disinfection of non-critical medical equipment such as lifts and handling aids reduces contamination and the risk of transmitting infection.
- [Waste and sharps handling](#) and environmental cleaning.

### Recommendations

#### 2. Cleaning, disinfection and/or laundering

##### 2.1 Mechanical lifts

- Clean and disinfect all surfaces of the lift after each use by:
  - removing any visible soil (blood and body fluids);
  - disinfecting with a hospital grade disinfectant provided by the facility.

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Version	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
Created	2013-02-20
Updated	2017-10-23
Revised	2020-08-21

## 2.2 Handling aids

- 2.2.1 Dedicate all patient handling aids (slings, sliders, transfer belts and restraints) for use by one patient until the patient is discharged or no longer needs the aid.
- 2.2.2 Ensure a sufficient supply of handling aids is available to accommodate patient demand and cleaning, disinfection and/or laundering requirements.
- 2.2.3 Discard handling aids that are single-use/disposable, damaged, or at the end of their recommended service life.
- 2.2.4 Clean and disinfect, e.g., with a ready-to-use disinfectant wipe, or launder reusable handling aids according to manufacturer's instructions using facility supplied cleaning and disinfection products and processes:
  - before use on another patient,
  - when visibly soiled;
  - according to a regular cleaning schedule.
- 2.2.5 Some aids (and components) are cleaned and disinfected at point-of-use while cloth or woven materials are laundered, e.g., at point-of-use:
  - Remove any hardware (plastic or metal) such as hooks, buttons or pins. Clean these components with a ready-to-use disinfectant wipe, e.g., accelerated hydrogen peroxide, and allow to dry. Store small parts in a clean, dry bag or container.
  - Clean leather materials, e.g., restraints with a ready-to-use disinfectant wipe after use or discard if penetration by blood and body fluids is suspected.
- 2.2.6 Restraints
  - Assess pins and buttons for wear. Internal foam disk in button may wear over time. Discard button if it becomes difficult to open or opens without the use of the magnetic key.
  - For limb restraints, place the white Velcro™ cover (supplied with restraint) over the entire black hook portion of the cuff to prevent lint from adhering. Once returned from laundering, assess Velcro™ strength. If Velcro™ does not hold; contact the vendor for replacement.
  - Wipe the carrying case with a ready-to-use disinfectant wipe after each use.
- 2.2.7 Launder fabric aids made of solid or mesh material (may be padded). Special directions for laundering items such as slider sheets, transfer belts, slings, restraint jackets, and wrist restraints may include:
  - labeling items with site and unit;

## 3. Inspection

- placing and securing soiled items in a mesh bag (available on request from laundry services);
- depositing mesh bag into regular soiled linen;
  - The mesh bag is returned to the user area on the clean linen cart (turnaround time 3-5 days).

Alternatively, slings, lift straps and restraints may be laundered in domestic washers if site procedures and manufacturer's instructions allow.

**Note:** Strong bleaches or other disinfecting agents may weaken fabrics and cleaning products may also weaken the base of permanently mounted lifting devices.

Manufacturers do not provide laundering instructions for disposable patient handling aids.

- 3.1 Inspect patient lifts, e.g., hanger bars, reusable handling aids and components before each use and at regularly documented intervals (determined by a risk assessment based upon

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frequency of use and manufacturer's recommendations) to ensure:

- lifts and handling aids are clean;
  - stitching is intact;
  - there is no damage to fabric, e.g., frayed material or weak stitching or body of clips/loops;
  - there are no rips, tears or holes;
  - label is intact and easy to read, e.g., not faded or damaged;
- date of first use is marked on the label.

3.2 Do not use the lift or handling aid if damage or a deficiency (outlined above) is identified.

3.3 Replace any worn or damaged components.

## 4. Maintenance

4.1 Follow manufacturer's written instructions for routine and preventative maintenance.

## 5. Storage

5.1 Label clean lifts and reusable handling aids and store in a clean equipment holding area or room according to the manufacturer's instructions, e.g., clean utility room.

5.2 If lifts and handling aids are not cleaned immediately after use, label as contaminated and store in a soiled area, e.g., soiled utility, until cleaned.

5.3 Label single-patient use and dedicated aids (including hardware components such as buttons, magnetic key) with the patient's name and store according to manufacturer's instructions in a clean area in the patient's room, e.g., patient locker, closet, or sling hook.

## 6. Policies and procedures

6.1 Develop a written procedure (posted and easily accessible) for cleaning and disinfection or laundering that includes the following:

- Cleaning, disinfection or laundering, and maintenance (routine and preventative) instructions in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and current standards.
- Device specific processes for:
  - Reusable fabric and the types of washer and dryer systems that may be used; washing and drying instructions; and clarification on use of chlorine and/or oxygen based bleach system.
  - Wipeable surfaces (non-porous and smooth) and the types of disinfectants to be used.
  - Removing defective or damaged equipment from service and notifying healthcare workers.
- Assignment of staff responsible for cleaning, e.g., environmental services, nursing staff, etc., monitoring and acting on upgrade or recall notices for equipment or software.
- Documentation of routine scheduled cleaning.
- Process for differentiating clean and contaminated, e.g., signs/labels indicating whether the item is clean or contaminated.

## 7. Education and training

7.1 Ensure staff are trained to use current or new equipment and receive regular competency checks on the safe use of lifts and handling aids, according to the manufacturer's instructions, e.g., cleaning instructions for slings, chairs and restraints and written policy or procedure.

7.2 Staff responsible for cleaning and disinfection tasks should be knowledgeable about Routine Practices,

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Created	2013-02-20
Updated	2017-10-23
Revised	2020-08-21

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Additional Precautions, and unit/facility specific procedures for cleaning lifts and handling devices including:

- cleaning frequencies;
- cleaning, disinfection and or laundering methods including laundering of reusable fabric slings, the proper cleaning method of wipeable slings, and disposal of single-patient use or disposable devices;
- inspection prior to use; reporting of malfunctioning or damaged equipment; and removal from use until repaired or replaced;
- maintenance;
- storage.

### 8. Selection of mechanical patient lifts, handling aids and restraints

8.1 Select mechanical patient lifts constructed with smooth, non-porous material and clean lines that facilitate cleaning and disinfection.

- Hand controls must be resistant to moisture damage and easily cleaned and disinfected.

8.2 Select handling aids (transfer slings, belts, sliders and restraints) constructed of materials that are easily laundered or cleaned and disinfected.

8.3 Before purchase, the unit/facility:

- Ensures the unit/facility has the capacity to clean and disinfect and/or launder reusable devices using AHS supplied cleaning and disinfection products and Linen and Environmental Services processes.
- Assesses vendor training and education resources.
- Consults the following AHS programs to review device-specific instructions and recommendations:
  - Clinical user;
  - Linen and Environmental Services (LES);
  - Infection Prevention and Control (IPC);
  - Contracting, Procurement, and Supply Management (CPSM);
  - Facility Maintenance and Engineering (FME);
  - Workplace Health and Safety (WHS);
  - Any other relevant programs.
- Evaluates manufacturer's instructions for use and ensures they include:
  - Detailed written cleaning, disinfection procedures and preventative maintenance information for all components.
  - Disinfection products with a Health Canada **drug identification number** (DIN).
  - Recommended service life and inspection specifications.
  - Labels with:
    - An area on the label to record patient name (required for some handling aids).
    - Indications for use, i.e. disposable or reusable.
    - Cleaning, disinfection, and/or laundering instructions for reusable devices.
    - A symbol for cleaning with maximum temperature for washing and drying.
    - A place to indicate "date of first use".
    - A warning not to use a damaged or eroded/threadbare sling.

Version	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
Created	2013-02-20
Updated	2017-10-23
Revised	2020-08-21

## Definitions

**Ceiling Lifts** means lifts (mounted or overhead) attached to fixed track systems installed on ceilings or supported via wall installation.

**Drug Identification Number (DIN)** means the number disinfectant manufacturers obtain from Health Canada prior to marketing. The DIN indicates that labelling and supporting data have been provided and the Therapeutic Products Directorate has confirmed the product is effective and safe for its intended use. In Canada, disinfectants are regulated as drugs under the Food and Drug Act and Regulations.

**Handling Aids** means equipment used to lift, transfer or restrain patients e.g., slings, belts, sliders and restraints. Aids may be manufactured from flexible materials such as fabric, which adapts to the shape of the body, or from rigid materials such as plastic or stainless steel.

Aids may be designed by the manufacturer to be reusable, single-patient use or single-use.

**Hospital Grade** disinfectant means a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN) from Health Canada and approval for use as a low-level disinfectant in Canadian hospitals.

**Mechanical Patient Lifts** means equipment used to lift, transfer, reposition or move patients. Examples include mobile (portable) sling lifts, stand-assist lifts, mechanized lateral transfer aids and ceiling mounted lifts.

**Non-Critical** means medical equipment which either touches only intact skin but not mucous membranes, or does not directly touch the patient.

**Patient** means an adult or child who receives or has requested healthcare or services from AHS and its healthcare providers or individuals authorized to act on behalf of AHS. This term is inclusive of residents, clients and outpatients.

**Single-Patient Use** means medical equipment/devices that may be used on a single patient and may be re-used on the same patient, but may not be used on other patients.

## References (complete list available on request)

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