SAFETY ALERT
Patient lifting slings

Purpose
The purpose of this safety alert is to:
• inform people of the risk of patients falling out of patient lifting slings attached to patient hoists while the hoist is being moved
• provide guidance on ways to control the risk of a patient falling from a patient lifting sling/hoist and to ensure a safe system of work is followed.

Background
Workplace Health and Safety Queensland investigated an incident involving an elderly person who allegedly fell from a sling that was attached to a patient lifting hoist. The patient sustained injuries including a broken leg.

The investigation highlighted the need for the regular reassessment of the patient to ensure a safe method of transfer.

Recommended control or prevention measures

Patient assessment
Assess the patient to determine the appropriate sling, hoist and transfer method to use.

Reassess the patient on a regular basis or when there is a notable change to their physical and/or mental status to ensure that the appropriate sling, hoist and transfer method is used.

For transfers that rate a high risk of patient injury which cannot be adequately controlled, eliminate the risk by providing an alternate care plan e.g. sponge bath in bed.

Communicate any changes in the patient’s transfer requirements to all staff who are responsible for the care of the patient e.g. document in the patient care plan, update at staff changeover.

Proper sling selection
Selecting the type and size of sling should be based on the patient assessment and their transfer requirements.

Use slings that provide sufficient leg support to prevent patients slipping through slings.

Check the selected sling has the appropriate Safe Work Load (SWL) for the patient and is compatible with the hoist being used.

Note: sling sizes are not consistent across manufacturers. This variation in sizing/fit results in different patient positioning.

Sling availability and integrity/condition
Ensure a range of sling types and sizes are available in order to meet the wide range of patient needs.

Follow manufacturer’s specifications regarding checking sling and hoist integrity and condition.
As a minimum:
- Inspect the condition of the sling and hoist to ensure good working order prior to each use. A sling is unsafe to use if the sling (particularly the attachment points, seams and other fragile areas) is frayed or torn, has holes, broken clips or failing components.
- Implement a proactive maintenance program for slings and hoists.

Training in correct sling selection and use
Workers should be trained in:
- how to choose appropriate slings including sling type, size and weight limits, application of slings
- consequences of incorrect sling selection and application
- inspection prior to use
- infection control, hygiene, laundering and maintenance.

Other administrative controls
- Do not lift patients higher than is necessary during the transfer.
- Ensure a clear path between the two transfer surfaces.
- Provide adequate number of staff to safely perform hoist transfers.

Manufacturers and suppliers of lifting slings must:
- Provide sufficient information to assist with the selection of the appropriate type and size of sling for individual patients including the patient’s physical measurements and medical condition.
- Place caution labels on slings stating the importance of ensuring a patient sling is the correct size for a patient prior to lifting.
- Provide information with the slings on the most secure method and configuration for attaching the patient lifting slings to the hoist in order to ensure patient safety.

Legislative requirements
The Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 sets out the laws about health and safety requirements affecting most workplaces, work activities and specified high risk plant in Queensland. It seeks to protect the health and safety of everyone at a workplace. Obligation holders should pay particular attention to sections 28 (2), 32, and 32A and B.

Further information
Visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) for more information on:
- People handling
- Manual Tasks Involving the Handling of People Code of Practice 2001
- Risk Management Code of Practice 2007
- Health and safety information for people working in the healthcare industry.

Alternatively call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Other useful links:
- [Designing workplaces for safer handling of people (non-Queensland Government link)](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au)

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