

Supporting people with personal hygiene care

What is the problem?

Providing support with personal hygiene tasks, such as showering or toileting, to people with a disability has been associated with musculoskeletal injuries in the disability services industry.

What are the risks?

Workers may be at risk of injuries from strains to the back, neck and shoulders when bending, reaching, twisting and exerting high or unexpected forces.

The common sources of risks include:

Task

- A mismatch between the assistance required by the person and the documentation identifying their physical support needs.
- Aids and equipment not being provided and/or used when assessed as necessary.
- Unexpected and unplanned movement by the person.

Environment

- Inadequate space to shower/bath/toilet the person.
- Wet or slippery floors.

Equipment

- Unsuitable equipment or aids.
- Faulty equipment or aids.
- No equipment or aids.

These issues should be considered during the initial assessment of the client's needs and any risks identified should be controlled prior to provision of service.

What are solutions to the problem?

The risk of injury to workers can be eliminated or reduced by the following safety measures:

Systems

- Identify hazards and address the risks associated with bathing, toileting or showering the person with a disability, taking into account the level of support the person requires
- Conduct an individualised assessment regarding the physical support needs of the client, including equipment and aids required

- Identify and implement risk control measures and integrate occupational health and safety (OHS) controls into the client's support plan (This information can also be recorded in a separate OHS plan)
- Provide workers with information, instruction and training on the client's physical support needs, including OHS controls
- Encourage the person with a disability to actively participate and/or contribute to physical support tasks where possible.
- Implement systems to:
 - regularly seek information from the worker to check if their work environment, tasks or client's needs have changed, or need to change
 - re-assess the tasks and environment
 - update and document the client's physical support plan
 - monitor the implementation and use of OHS controls so the worker's and client's needs are safely met
 - provide a system so workers can report any changes or safety issues to their employer
 - provide workers with training in specific tasks or work instructions.

Equipment/aid provision and use

- Equipment or aids to support a person with a disability and undertake personal hygiene tasks are:
 - assessed as suitable for the task
 - appropriate for the space (eg hoists or shower chair)
 - available, easy to access from storage, set up and use
 - installed or supplied prior to service commencing
 - maintained in good working order
 - assessed as appropriate for the needs of the person with a disability and safe for use by the worker.

A Health and Safety Solution

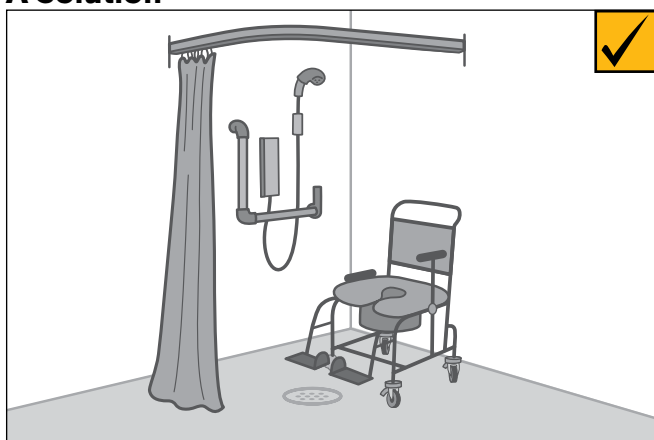
- To reduce the risk of injury to workers provide appropriate equipment for the person who requires assistance including:
 - a shower chair/commode
 - care assisted bench
 - hand/grab rails
 - hi-lo bath
 - hi-lo change table
 - hi-lo hygiene chair
 - over toilet seat
 - standing aid
 - shower trolley.
- Provide workers with training in use of equipment and aids.

The problem



Leaning across bath to assist a person with a disability means the worker is in a bent position and overreaching.

A solution



Using a shower chair in a large shower space minimises reaching and lifting.

Floor surfaces

- Provide stable slip proof mats on the bathroom floor.
- Provide suitable floor surfaces for moving wheeled equipment if required (no bath mats or steps).
- Provide enclosed, non-slip soled shoes, coveralls or gumboots for workers.

Bathroom layout

- Assess available space and layout in relation to the required tasks.
- Develop and implement operational procedures to carry out tasks safely within the available space.
- If the bathroom is not suitable for the tasks, assess the bathroom for potential redesign opportunities such as removing the bath and fitting a walk-in shower with door or lip that does not impede use of aids.

Further Information

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Toll-free 1800 136 089

Email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

worksafe.vic.gov.au

Related WorkSafe Health and Safety Solutions

- *Moving and supporting people with a disability*
- *Assisting people in wheelchairs*
- *Handling wheelchairs in and out of vehicles*
- *Occupational violence*
- *Moving/lifting objects*
- *Vacuuming*
- *Mopping*
- *Cleaning bathrooms*
- *Making beds*
- *Work related driving: Transporting people and moving equipment*

Related WorkSafe publications

- *Manual Handling Code of Practice, 2000*
- *A guide to designing workplaces for safer handling of people*
- *Transferring people safely*

Other related publications

- *Department of Human Services, Accommodation standards and design guidelines – Shared supported accommodation, 2004*
- *Victorian home care industry occupational health and safety guide*

Available from

worksafe.vic.gov.au and health.vic.gov.au

On 18 June 2017, the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations 2017) replaced the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (OHS Regulations 2007), which expired on this date. **This publication has not yet been updated to reflect the changes introduced by the OHS Regulations 2017 and should not be relied upon as a substitute for legal advice.**

Information on the key changes introduced by the OHS 2017 Regulations can be found in the guidance titled *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017: Summary of changes* - available at https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/207659/ISBN-OHS-regulations-summary-of-changes-2017-04.pdf. However, this guidance document contains material of a general nature only and is not to be used as a substitute for obtaining legal advice.