

Health and Welfare Alert
Choking #18-2-09

Purpose

The purpose of this Alert is to provide critical information to caregivers on choking prevention. People with developmental disabilities are at a high risk for choking. Those providing care can help reduce these risks, provide timely care, and potentially save a life. This Alert will provide some signs that may indicate a person is choking and what you can do to help.

All DD Employees are required to be trained, annually, on identification and reporting of Major Unusual Incidents and Unusual Incidents prior to unsupervised contact. This training includes the review of any **Health and Welfare Alerts** released since the previous calendar year's training.

For questions or comments regarding this Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

Last year, nine Ohioans with developmental disabilities passed away due to choking related accidents. We believe prevention is the key to saving lives. While nine people lost their lives, many more were saved by the fast action of others. In fact in over 350 other cases, a caregiver (family member, staff member or friend) successfully intervened by performing abdominal thrusts or back blows and saved that person's life. We want to provide some information to you about choking and urge you to be prepared in the event that someone you are caring for chokes.

What is Choking? When you breathe air goes through your nose or mouth and then down a tube called the trachea (sometimes called the "wind pipe") and then into your lungs. If food or something else gets into your wind pipe and gets stuck, then the air you need cannot get to your lungs. When that happens, you are choking.

Who is in danger of Choking?

Anyone can choke, but choking is more likely for someone who:

- Has cerebral palsy or a seizure disorder.
- Has few or no teeth, or wears dentures.
- Has trouble chewing or swallowing.
- Does not sit up while eating.
- Someone who is prescribed medications such as muscle relaxants, anticonvulsants or psychotropics, which may delay swallowing or suppress protective gag and cough reflexes.
- Has Gastroesophageal Reflux Disorder (GERD) which may cause aspiration of refluxed stomach contents.

What Causes Choking? Certain behaviors can cause choking. These behaviors include:

- Eating too quickly.
- Not chewing food completely, so that large pieces remain in the mouth.
- Talking or laughing while eating.

How can you tell if someone is Choking:

- Trying to speak, but are not able.
- Coughing weakly.
- Breathing noisily or making high pitched sounds.
- Turning blue in the face.
- Nail beds turning blue.
- Fainting.
- Moving around a lot and looking very upset.
- Not responding.
- Slumped over in chair where they were eating.
- Wide -Eyed Look on face.



Choking Prevention:

- Cut food into small pieces.
- Encourage individuals to chew slowly and completely before swallowing.
- Do not talk or laugh while you have food in your mouth.
- Use any needed adaptive equipment.
- Do not run or play while you have food in your mouth.
- Eat with other people who can help you.
- Make sure proper supervision is provided.
- Serve food in proper diet texture

Steps to Take if someone is choking:

- **Always follow your First Aid training**
- **If an individual's airway is blocked, have someone call 911 immediately (if another person is unavailable, call 911 yourself) and perform Abdominal Thrust (formerly known as the Heimlich maneuver). This has been extremely successful in dislodging foods.**
- **If an individual is in a wheelchair or has physical characteristics that make it difficult to do Abdominal Thrust, move the individual to a flat, hard surface to ensure the greatest success. Be ready to initiate quick chest compressions to help unblock airway.**
- **Even if the Abdominal thrust is successful, immediately notify a health care professional. It is advisable to have the individual physically checked by a health care professional following the use of these procedures.**

More Info

For further assistance regarding Choking Prevention, please contact:

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class>

American Heart Association

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>

SafeKids USA

<http://www.safekids.org/>

For Questions or Comments

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