



Health & Safety Alert # 41-06-07

Choking Study Results

Purpose of This Alert

The Department, in conjunction with the Mortality Review Committee completed a review of over 300 incidents of medical emergencies and deaths related to choking. This Alert is meant to provide information on the foods most typically noted, the location of the incidents, mealtime concerns, and preventive measures to reduce the number of choking incidents.

A. Typical Foods Involved

1. Meat – hamburgers, hotdogs, sandwiches of all types and chicken.
2. Pasta – pizza and other pasta.
3. Vegetables – potatoes which were mainly french fries.
4. Fruits – apples and watermelon.

Meat was noted in 35% of the incidents.

Pasta was noted 15%

Vegetables were noted 10%

Fruits were noted 8%

Miscellaneous cases involving PICA and cases when the food was not identified make up the remainder.

Most of the incidents occurred during lunch and dinner (75%).

B. Location of Incidents

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|-----------------------|-----|
| Private ICF/MRs | 25% |
| Workshops | 22% |
| Developmental Centers | 11% |
| Licensed facility | 7% |
| Community | 7% |
| County Board schools | 6% |
| Family home | 4% |

C. Age Range for Choking Incidents

The age range for the choking incidents was from 2 to 85. It was interesting to note that that 45 to 54 age group has the largest percentage by almost double that of any other group.

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|---------|-----|---------|-----|
| 0 – 4 | 3% | 45 – 54 | 33% |
| 5 – 14 | 3% | 55 – 64 | 18% |
| 15 – 24 | 7% | 65 – 74 | 6% |
| 25 – 34 | 11% | 75 – 84 | 4% |
| 35 – 44 | 15% | 85 + | 0% |

D. Individuals With Identified Mealtime Concerns

It was frequently noted that although individuals may not have had previous incidents, there were identified mealtime concerns. These included:

1. Eating too fast.
2. Stuffing food.
3. Food stealing.

In a number of cases, the food was not cut into the appropriate sized pieces or the incorrect diet was given. There were also several instances where diet changes were not communicated to all persons who assist with meals whether it was workshops or family members or unfamiliar support staff.

E. What We Have Learned

What we have learned is likely what we already understand. Choking can happen easily and quickly to anyone. Make this time as safe as possible by ensuring the applicable preventive measures are in place.

E. Preventive Measures

- Be diligent during meals, supervision must be a high priority.
- Be especially watchful of those individuals with mealtime concerns.
- Be sure good assessments of eating skills have been done where appropriate.
- It is important that correct diets be followed.
- It is important to communicate diet changes to all settings.
- It is important to recognize foods that are common in choking incidents and pay close attention at meals when these are on the menu.
- It is important that diets be properly prepared based on the individual's plan.
- Educate caregivers on the importance of mealtime safety.
- It is an important time for managers, supervisors, volunteers, or family to be present and assist with the meal.
- Use adaptive equipment and aides as indicated.

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

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