

Bed Rails

Bed rails are used to reduce the risk of a person falling out of bed. They may also provide a level of security and comfort for some people. However, bed rails may also potentially create risks to the user. There have been incidents of people being caught, trapped or entangled in beds with rails and incidents of injuries resulting from people attempting to climb over bed rails to get out of bed. Bed rails may also increase a person's feelings of isolation or cause a person to be unnecessarily restricted.



Injuries and fatalities caused by a person becoming trapped in bed rails have occurred through the boards of individual side rails, space between split side rails, between the side rail and mattress, and between the headboard or footboard, side rail and mattress.

People at risk of injury from bed rails may include the very young, and older people with confusion, restlessness, lack of muscle control, reduced mobility, or a combination of these factors. Increased risk also may occur when the person's size and/or weight are inappropriate for the bed's dimensions.

When considering the use of bed rails, always assess the person's level of risk of injury/entrapment. This includes the person's physical, cognitive, behavioural, medication issues and/or other medical issues. Assessment will help to determine how best to keep the person safe.

Some people do not need bed rails. Consider the alternatives to bed rails such as:

- ▶ using height-adjustable beds that can be lowered for the person's safety and that can be raised to accommodate both the person and a carer;
- ▶ using mattresses with raised edges;
- ▶ using padded floor mats beside the bed with a lowered bed height.

Where use of bed rails is determined to be the most suitable option, consider the following strategies to minimise the risk of injury or fatality from bed rails:

- ▶ Providing information and training to bed rail users, carers and staff in healthcare facilities regarding installation and use of bed rails as well as the causes of entrapment and how the risk can be minimised.
- ▶ Re-evaluation and ongoing monitoring and assessment of the bed, fit of the mattress and bed rails and potential for gaps between rails, mattresses, bed heads and rail covers where a person's body parts can become trapped or their breathing restricted.

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- ▶ Use of appropriate mattresses and reduction of the gap between the mattress and bed rails, headboards and footboards (mattresses should not leave a gap wide enough to entrap a person's head, body or limb).
 - ▶ Being alert to replacement mattresses with dimensions that differ from the original equipment supplied or specified by the bed frame manufacturer.
 - ▶ Being aware that movement or compression of a mattress can create gaps.
 - ▶ Being aware that air mattresses or mattress overlays may pose an increased risk as mattress compression can widen the space between the mattress and the bed rail, and can increase the risk of a person rolling off the bed or against the bed rail.
 - ▶ Appropriate use of bed rail protectors, bed rail padding and retrofitted rails.
 - ▶ Taking care when adjusting bed rails so that tubes or electrical cords are not caught or compressed.
 - ▶ Providing a personal alarm so the person can get assistance if required for repositioning or to get out of bed.
 - ▶ Keeping the bed wheels locked whenever possible.
 - ▶ Using assistive equipment such as a transfer or mobility aid.
 - ▶ If alternating air pressure mattresses are being used, consider switching the mattress pump to 'static' mode before bed rails are moved and transfers and other movements are performed.

This information is intended as a general guide only—the safe use of bed rails is dependent upon the person's circumstances.

For individual advice or further information please contact your local health care professional or the Independent Living Centre. Appointments to visit the Independent Living Centre display, including beds and bedding equipment, can also be made.

Acknowledgements

This information is based on the following documents:

US Department of Health and Human Services, "Hospital Bed System Dimensional and Assessment Guidance to Reduce Entrapment – Guidance for Industry and FDA Staff", March 2006.

NSW Health Department Newsletter, "Safety Advocate: Bed Rail Safety", NSW Health, Issue 4, April 2003.

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre

11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone:

1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only)
or (08) 8266 5260

Fax:

(08) 8266 5263

Email:

ilcsa@dfc.sa.gov.au

Website:

www.disability.sa.gov.au

Accessible off-street parking is available.

Bus routes:

From the city T500/T501 or
207/208 to Stop 28 Sudholz Road

Timetable information: (08) 8210 1000



