



Safety Alert 004/2012

The use of bed rails in Designated Centres

1. What is the risk?

Older people are at serious risk of death and injury from the incorrect use of bed rails. Bed rails, also known as side rails or cot sides, are widely used to reduce the risk of falls. Although not suitable for everyone, they can be effective when used with the right bed, in the right way, for the right person. However, accident data shows that bed rails do not always prevent falls and may introduce other risks.

2. Recent incidents

Poorly fitting bed rails have caused injuries where a person's neck, chest or limbs have become trapped in gaps between the bed rails or between the bed rail and the bed, headboard, or mattress.

3. Key responses

Providers should take a number of safety precautions in relation to risk managing the use of bed rails in designated centres. Providers should ensure:

- The centre's restraint policy sets out the measures in place to control risks to residents' safety. The policy adheres to regulations and national guidelines.
- The policy is reflected in practice.
- Bed rails are only used when a risk assessment has determined it is the most appropriate solution to prevent falls. the rail is suitable for the bed and mattress.
- The mattress fits snugly between the rails.
- The rail is correctly fitted, secure, regularly inspected and maintained.
- Gaps that could cause entrapment of neck, head and chest are eliminated.
- Staff are trained in the risks and safe use of bed rails.
- Any accident, incident or near miss is acted upon, recorded in the centre's accident/incident register and reviewed by the person in charge.
- The risk assessment is carried out by a competent person. The points to consider during a risk assessment include:
 - is the person likely to fall from their bed?
 - if so, are bed rails an appropriate solution?
 - could the risk of falling from bed be reduced by means other than bed rails?
 - could the use of a bed rail increase risk – for example, if an active but disorientated person tries to climb over it?
 - could the bed occupant's physical or clinical condition increase the risk of entrapment?

4. Relevant standards and regulations

- Standard 21: Responding to Behaviour that is Challenging. National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland. Health Information and Quality Authority, 2009.
- Regulation 7 and Schedule 3 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013.
- 'Towards a Restraint Free Environment in Nursing Homes', Department of Health, 2011.