



Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

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INTERIM COMMISSIONER

Office of Integrated Health

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Dear Providers, Families, and Others providing support,

The holidays are fast approaching and it is a busy time for individuals we support as well as the staff who support them both in our communities and our facilities. Individuals may attend celebrations or spend time at home with their families. Staff is often managing busy personal lives with holiday events, family visits and travel. Coverage schedules may be different in residential services or day programs. With so much activity going on, it is important to remind ourselves and staff to remain focused on those we support and their fundamental needs. Here are some tips and reminders for the holiday season:

1. Be sure those families who may be supporting individuals at home or at community events, and other less familiar providers are educated regarding:

- Special diets and feeding procedures. Cookies, pies, candies and rich foods are part of many people's holiday celebration but they may be harmful to individuals who are on special diets. Be sure everyone involved is aware of any food allergies.
- Relevant choking/aspiration risk prevention. Holiday cookies and pies are often filled with nuts, dried fruit, chopped up candies, and other goodies that can be dangerous for the individual who is at risk for choking.
- Bowel movements/risks related to bowel obstruction. Be alert particularly to constipation.
- Seizure management
- Relevant perineal hygiene procedures to prevent UTIs. Be sure caretakers know how to perform these procedures and how often.
- The ways the individual communicates pain or distress
- When to take an individual to the doctor or emergency department. Be alert to health changes and make sure the individual receives prompt medical care. Waiting even a few hours can make the difference between life and death.
- Fall risk and prevention. Take special care to provide assistance to keep individuals safe from slips and falls during the holidays.

2. Be sure individuals and family members remember that individuals may be sensitive to:

- Changes in schedules
- Changes in personnel
- Changes in the home/residence décor, meals, snacks, activities

3. Help staff stay focused "on the job" while working during what can be a very busy and potentially distracting time of year.

4. Make sure all staff and families know each day who their back-up resources are, how to access emergency services, etc.

Sincerely,
Jack W Barber, MD
Medical Director, DBHDS