# Health Trends



Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services

# **Office Integrated Health**

# Health and Safety Awareness Preventing Suffocation



Suffocation, also known as asphyxiation, is a condition of being deprived of oxygen by having breathing stopped. It is often a silent killer. Staff and family members can proactively identity risks for suffocation and take preventative measures to mitigate those risks.

Types of suffocation incidents can include becoming entangled in bed sheets, pillows, safety belts or harnesses which cut off oxygen; falling between a bed and a wall; or the blockage of an airway with large, inedible items.

In addition to identifying suffocation hazards, staff and family members can also identify individuals who are at an increased risk for choking. There are several factors which increase a person's risk for choking some of these factors include:

- Neurological and muscular disorders such as cerebral palsy or seizure disorders
- Dysphagia (difficulty swallowing)
- Side effects from medications
- Gastroesphogeal reflux disease (GERD)
- Incorrect diet texture
- Few or no teeth
- Dentures
- Swallowing non-edible objects (Pica)
- Food stealing resulting in obtaining nonprescribed/inappropriate diet, eating too quickly, or cramming food in the mouth

#### **Safety Tips for Prevention**

To maintain a safe environment for individuals at risk for suffocation, staff should perform frequent checks of the individual's home environment. Additionally, ensure that all staff who care for the individual are aware of specific supports that may be required to maintain safety. More safety tips include:

- Addressing environmental factors which pose a risk for example: spacing between a bed and a wall; cords for window blinds
- Never leave a person unattended when using safety harnesses, slings, or belts which could place an individual at risk.
- □ Ensure that staff are trained to properly position harnesses, slings, and belts.
- □ If an individual poses a risk for Pica, follow all protocols for environmental safety hazards.
- □ Use mealtime protocols for individuals with aspiration risks
- □ Follow all doctor's orders for proper seating, equipment use, and mealtimes.
- Request a swallow study if the individual has:
  - Experienced a choking incident
  - Appears to have difficulty swallowing
  - Coughs frequently when feeding or drinking
  - Has had a previous case of aspiration pneumonia

Resources:

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (2018). Health trends. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/qwy49992/Downloads/june-2018-newsletter-final.pdf Department of Developmental Disabilities (2017). Preventing suffocation #90-4-17. Retrieved from

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Chadwick, D. D., & Jolliffe, J. (2009). A descriptive investigation of dysphagia in adults with intellectual disabilities. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 53(1), 29-43. Martin, B. & Corlew, M. (1990). The Incidence of Communication Disorders in Dysphagic Patients. Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders, 55, 28-32.

Reilly, S., & Carr, L. (2001). Foreign body ingestion in children with severe developmental disabilities: a case study. Dysphagia, 16(1), 68-73.

Samuels, R., & Chadwick, D.D. (2006). Predictors of asphyxiation risk in adults with intellectual disabilities and dysphagia. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 50(5),

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## **Radon Testing**

What is Radon? Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that results from the decay of Uranium, a silvery-grey metal, which is found in certain types of soil and bedrock. You can't see, smell or taste the gas; it can only be detected by testing. Radon is normally reduced to very low levels in outdoor air, but in certain circumstances it can reach much higher concentrations indoors.

Radon gas decays into radioactive particles that can get trapped into your lungs when you breathe. This can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of a lifetime. Not everyone exposed to elevated levels of radon will develop lung cancer. High levels of radon can be found in all 50 states and certain areas of Virginia have higher potential for exposure than others.

While not required, it is recommended to test for radon in your home. The Virginia Department of Health is offering, for a limited time, radon testing kits for \$3.

To order a kit or for more information please visit the Department of Health's website at <u>https://www.vdhradon.org/</u>.



More radon resources can be found through the Virginia Department of Health's website or the Environmental Protection Agency.

<u>EPA.gov/radon</u> <u>www.vdh.virginia.gov/radiological-health</u>

#### Save the Date! Skin Integrity and Oral Health Training

The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Health Support Network and The Virginia Department of Health's Dental Health Program are excited to present a FREE educational opportunity for people providing direct care to individuals with Developmental Disabilities

> When: February 21, 2019 9am-4pm

Where: Community Systems Inc 10400 Eaton Place Suite 501 Fairfax, VA

Limited

Seating!

Register Here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6RP3CGC

### Stay tuned for more training dates!

This interactive workshop is for participants to learn how to deliver the best oral care for even the most challenging of clients; support individuals who need improved oral care, and prevent diseases of the mouth through good oral hygiene. Additionally, learn how to support individuals in preventing skin breakdown and acquire best practice skills for skin care. Upon completion, participants will have the information and tools to present the program in their home agencies for staff training. This interactive workshop is designed to "Train the Trainer". The curriculum and all of the tools needed to teach the class will be provided.