



Important information about Vehicle and Transportation Safety

The purpose of this Health and Safety Alert is to share reliable transportation safety practices with provider agencies and to emphasize the importance of implementing policies and procedures to address safety, staff training, and the use of equipment required for the safe transportation of individuals receiving services, including those who use wheelchairs.

Providers of OPWDD certified facilities and programs are required to ensure that services and supports are provided with sufficient safeguards to address individuals' needs. Information in this Health and Safety Alert is intended to help agencies implement effective systems to improve transportation safety on an ongoing basis. Agencies may also incorporate this guidance, as appropriate, in their initial and annual safety and security training, required by OPWDD regulations in section 633.8 of 14 NYCRR Part 633.

Policy and Procedures:

Agencies should have policy and procedures to facilitate the safe transportation of individuals receiving services and the staff members providing them supports. Policies and procedures should, at minimum, include the following areas that are addressed further in this alert:

- Safe driving practices
- Passenger safety, including individual supervision and supports
- Use and maintenance of vehicle equipment, including wheelchair lifts and securement
- General vehicle maintenance
- Staff training

Safe Driving Practices:

- Follow all applicable NYS vehicle and local traffic laws
- Have a valid driver's license recognized by New York State
- Drive in a conservative, defensive, and courteous manner
- Abstain from cell phone use while the vehicle is in motion (e.g., text, email, talk)
- Be free from medications, drugs, or alcohol that might cause drowsiness or impede driving abilities
- Ensure all doors are locked while the vehicle is in motion
- Be aware that vans are heavier than cars and require more time to slow down and stop safely

Passenger Safety:

- Ensure that the driver and accompanying staff are familiar with individuals' supervision and support needs for entering and leaving the vehicle.

- Ensure that the driver and accompanying staff are familiar with individuals' supervision and support needs while the vehicle is parked and in motion.
- Ensure sufficient numbers of staff are assigned to accompany individuals during transportation and that staff sit in appropriate proximity to individuals in accordance with their supervision and support needs.
- Ensure there is sufficient room for all passengers, including staff, to sit safely and comfortably in the vehicle.
- Use approved occupant seatbelt or restraint/securement systems for all passengers as required (including wheelchair securement straps and tie downs). See also OPWDD INF 2020-04. Changes to Vehicle & Traffic Law section 1229-c Seat Belt Law.
<https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/10/inf-use-of-seat-belts-20-04-10.14.2020.pdf>
- Ensure individuals are not left unattended in a vehicle, even briefly, unless their plans specify that they can be left unattended in a vehicle.
- Ensure all individuals have exited the vehicle once it is parked at a destination.
- Ensure that individuals, and the driver and accompanying staff, do not eat or drink in a moving vehicle to prevent choking and aspiration. Plan ahead if food, beverages, and/or oral medication are needed for a trip. It is better to eat, drink, and administer medications outside of the parked vehicle in a safe location. If this is not possible, the vehicle should always be parked, and any eating, drinking, or administration of medications must be done in accordance with individuals' plans for supervision and support.

Use of Vans and Other Large Vehicles:

- **Boarding and Exiting a Van or Large Vehicle:**
 - Ensure that steps and the vehicle floor are clean, unobstructed, and in good repair
 - Provide individuals who are ambulatory with needed supervision and supports to safely step into and out of the vehicle and find their way to appropriate seats
- **Use of a lift:**
 - Provide continuous supervision and support when operating a lift to assist individuals entering and exiting a vehicle. A fall from a lift can be deadly.
 - When possible, arrange for two staff to assist with boarding and exiting the vehicle, with one staff inside the vehicle and the other staff on the ground.
 - Ensure the individual is seated in a safe and fully functional wheelchair with all equipment properly secured.
 - Ensure all wheelchair brakes are engaged and that power wheelchairs are powered off.
 - Ensure that the wheelchair base and frame fit properly on the lift.
 - Ensure that all lift equipment (e.g., roll stop mechanism) is properly engaged and in working order
 - Ensure there is safe clearance of the individual's head, arms, and legs as they enter the van.

- Note that no individual or staff member should stand on the lift to enter or exit the vehicle. An ambulatory individual who cannot enter the vehicle using the stairs should be evaluated by a physical or occupational therapist to determine the safest practice for that individual.
- **Wheelchair Securement:**
 - Never transport an individual using a wheelchair in a vehicle where the wheelchair securement equipment is not working properly.
 - Ensure that all fastening belts are used according to manufacturers' guidelines to secure the passenger and wheelchair. Specialized wheelchair securement training should be provided to staff, including:
 - Identification of the types of equipment used in agency vehicles;
 - Instruction on how to locate and use appropriate securement attachment points on each wheelchair, including use of quick straps and/or transportation system hook-ups; and
 - On-site demonstration of actual equipment use.
 - Store wheelchair securement equipment neatly on the vehicle, keeping it clean and free of debris. The best practice is to use equipment storage pouches.
 - Ensure that staff complete the securement process as each passenger enters the vehicle.

Vehicle Maintenance and Safety Checks:

- Agencies should have policy and procedures to ensure that vehicles and equipment are in safe operating condition.
- Procedures should include specific maintenance and safety checks needed and the frequency of those checks, as well as identification of staff, by title, responsible for such checks.
- Maintenance and safety checks should include, but not be limited to the following:
 - Ensure that vehicles are inspected and receive preventive maintenance in accordance with manufacturers' specifications
 - Ensure seatbelts and other passenger securement equipment is present, clean, and operating properly
 - Ensure vehicle lifts are clean and in safe operating condition
 - Ensure that tires are properly inflated, and fluid levels are maintained in accordance with manufacturers' specifications
- Agencies should identify and provide standard safety equipment to be maintained in each vehicle and implement procedures to verify that the equipment is present.
- Safety items and equipment should include:
 - First aid kit
 - CPR mask

- Seat belt cutter
- Road safety kit (including reflective or illuminated devices to increase visibility of vehicle)
- Emergency telephone numbers
- A fully charged cell phone and phone charging device. If the vehicle does not have an assigned cell phone, the facility should have practices to ensure the driver carries a facility/agency cell phone when transporting individuals.

Staff Training Should Include:

- Agency vehicle and transportation safety policies and procedures
- Driver responsibilities and competencies
- Accompanying staff responsibilities and competencies
- Transportation safeguards, supervision, and supports for individuals receiving services
- Safe operation of vehicle equipment, including manual operation of a lift when the electronic system or batteries fail
- Use of safety items and equipment
- Procedures for safe evacuation of the vehicle in the event of emergency or break-down
- Periodic updates and review based on changes in individuals receiving services, changes in vehicles and equipment, and relevant changes in agency policy and procedures

More resources on wheelchair safety

- Securing Wheelchairs in a Vehicle [Resources for Success | Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs \(ny.gov\)](#)
- Training video - <https://shriver.umassmed.edu/programs/cdder/webinars/dds-safe-transportation-people-wheelchairs>
- Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) Guidelines for Use of Postural Support Devices in Vehicles can be found by using the following link:
[Guidelines for Use of Secondary Postural Support Devices by Wheelchair Users During Travel in Motor Vehicles](#)
- https://shriver.umassmed.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DDS-Safe-Procedures-for-Transporting-People-who-use-Wheelchairs_final_0.docx