

Advisory on Safety Measures to Prevent Choking and Swallowing Problems

Recent studies indicate that approximately 65% of people with developmental disabilities may have problems with swallowing. Another high risk group for swallowing problems is people who have experienced brain injuries. Swallowing problems may lead to choking or other serious medical problems, some of which may even lead to death.

Recommendation

DSPD recommends providers and case managers make sure that safety measures are put in place to ensure the health and safety of the people they serve, especially during times when people are eating.

Risk Factors

Providers and case managers should be especially watchful with people who:

- Have had any choking or swallowing problems in the past;
- Have difficulty swallowing certain fluid consistencies and/or food textures;
- Have difficulty getting themselves into the proper position to eat;
- Have medical problems that affect gagging, choking and swallowing reflexes; Examples include: Cerebral Palsy, Brain Injury, Heartburn with reflux, Stroke and Dementia;
- Have a seizure disorder;
- Tend to eat too fast or stuff too much food in their mouth;
- Are taking medications that may relax the muscles used for chewing and swallowing, or decrease their gag reflex or make a person too sleepy.
 - *Use caution especially with those taking medications in the class known as Atypical Neuroleptics. Examples of Atypical Neuroleptics include:*

Clozapine (Clozaril™)	Olanzapine (Zyprexa™)
Quetiapine (Seroquel™)	Risperidone (Risperdal™)
Ziprasidone (Geodon™)	

Internet Resources

Providers and case managers are urged to view the following internet resources for further information regarding safety measures to prevent choking and other problems related to swallowing.

www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/documents/Documents%20for%20Web/Health_SafetyAlert_choking_071509.pdf

www.ombudmddd.state.mn.us/alerts/chokingalert.pdf

http://www.equipforequality.org/programs/abuseinvestigation/alert_chokingwarning.pdf