

Ergonomic Tips for Resident or Patient Bathrooms

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to assist workers, supervisors and managers in health care facilities and members of their JHSCs find ergonomic solutions to real and potential problems in their workplaces.

Many health care facilities make small renovations to improve resident/patient areas. The next time your facility plans such a change, ask staff to help to identify improvements to keep everyone safer.

Space Requirements

Think of the amount of space required in the new or renovated bathroom. For example, in bathrooms for the elderly or disabled, the amount of space needed will depend on the answers to these questions:

- How many wheelchair-accessible toilets and toilet cubicles will be needed?
- What assistance do the residents/patients need now, and what do you think they will need in the future?
- How much space will be needed for devices such as a mechanical lift?

Pay particular attention to wheelchair accessibility and to flexibility in the use of spaces. Consider the comparative usefulness of space divided by curtains versus space divided by walls.

Location of Toilets

Design of toilet cubicles and placement of toilets is important for preventing injuries among caregivers. For example:

- Toilets should be far enough away from walls to provide enough space for employees to safely assist residents/patients.
- Wheelchair-accessible toilet cubicles should permit the wheelchair to approach from either side and allow sideways transfer.

- Consider the appropriate height for the toilet. Do you need a raised seat?
- Install handrails.
- Be sure to appropriately place the toilet paper dispenser and handrails to avoid twisting the body while resident/patient handling.

Flooring

Identify the characteristics that the flooring should have to protect residents/patients and staff. Examples of issues to consider include:

- Avoiding slips and falls.
- Permitting easy movement of commodes, wheelchairs and other wheeled equipment.
- Ensuring a smooth transition between different types of flooring.
- Meeting infection control and housekeeping needs.

Once you know what you want from your flooring material, find out what materials are available. Pilot test the flooring before making your choice.

- Watch the person's body language, including shaking or clenching fists, or a change in posture. He/she may be ready to do something physical.

Storage

When planning or renovating toilet areas, determine the type, amount and location of storage needed for items of all sizes.

Examples of items to be stored include:

- Personal toiletries (soap, shampoo, and so on).
- Transfer aids.
- Equipment needed for care and treatment.
- Commodes, laundry hampers and waste containers.

When planning for storage:

- Consider how to handle heavy, large and unmanageable objects.
- Limit the weight of objects and the need to lift them (e.g., repack supplies in user-friendly, lightweight containers of small amounts and store them in accessible places).
- If appropriate, ensure that part of the storage area can be locked.

Transfer and Lift Needs

When designing the physical space:

- Consider transfer and lift requirements (e.g., staff, equipment and procedures).
- Ensure that the doorways and the spaces around toilets are large enough to accommodate mobile lifting devices.
- Consider using ceiling-mounted overhead lifting devices — this will require adequate structural support.

Grab Bars

Before proceeding with installation:

- Ideally, provide grab bars to the right, left and back of the toilet.
- Consider swing away bars that are mounted on the back wall. These do not have legs that extend to the floor and therefore are not as much of an obstacle when using a mechanical lift.

Sinks

When designing the sink area:

- Choose taps and other control mechanisms that are easy for persons with physical limitations to identify and use.
- Consider the height of the sink and towel containers, for both wheelchair users and those standing.
- Ensure that the undersides of sinks are free for wheelchair clearance.

Lighting

The amount of lighting, and its location, are important to consider when planning for renovations. Remember to:

- Keep the general (overhead) lighting level relatively low to avoid glare.
- Use task lighting where extra light is required (e.g., for treatment or examination procedures).

Other Considerations

Build in alarms for staff and residents/patients in case they need assistance.

Remember to accommodate the needs of housekeeping and maintenance staff (e.g., hold-open latches for cubicle doors while cleaning).

For more detailed information on renovation tips see PSHSA's publication *Ergonomic Guidelines in the Design of Long-Term Care Facilities* found at www.pshsa.ca.