



TITLE

SAFE BATHING TEMPERATURES

SCOPE

Provincial

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PS-47

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Vice President & Chief Health Operations Officer (Southern AB)

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Not applicable

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NOTE: The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

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OBJECTIVES

- To set out standards and accountabilities in all Alberta Health Services (AHS) settings where staff assist **patients** in **bathing** to prevent harm to the patient as a result of incorrect water temperature.
- In all settings, including acute care and **continuing care**, staff have a duty to ensure safe water temperatures when assisting patients with bathing.
- To establish how often patients shall be offered bathing across **Continuing Care Designated Living Option** settings.

PRINCIPLES

AHS is committed to the provision of safe and appropriate bathing, including safe bath and shower water temperatures and regular offering of bathing for all patients receiving assistance with bathing, in accordance with applicable legislation, codes, standards, and evidence informed practices.

Patients are particularly vulnerable during the bathing process and it is paramount that due care and attention are paid to water temperature and the unique clinical circumstances of each patient.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, Students, Volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of

Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary) working in all care settings, including acute care.

ELEMENTS

1. Safe Bath/Shower Water Temperatures

- 1.1 The safe water temperature range for **assisted bathing** for an adult is between 38 to 43 degrees Celsius.
- 1.2 The safe water temperature range for assisted bathing of infants is warm to touch of an adult's elbow or the inner aspect of the bare wrist.

2. Hottest Flowing Water Temperatures for Therapeutic Tubs in a Continuing Care Designated Living Option

- 2.1 The hottest flowing water into a **therapeutic tub** situated in a Continuing Care Designated Living Option shall not exceed 49 degrees Celsius.

3. Personnel

- 3.1 The supervising **health care professional** is responsible for ensuring that the **health care provider**:
 - a) is knowledgeable in assisted safe bathing and able to safely perform the task specific to the patient and care area (e.g. - infants, older adults, burn unit); and
 - b) attains and maintains the necessary competencies by:
 - (i) supporting the ongoing education needs that are necessary to obtain and maintain the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the assigned task; and
 - (ii) ensuring policies, procedures and job descriptions are in place to support safe care assignment processes.
- 3.2 Health care providers who assist with patient bathing shall demonstrate competency in the following, after receiving clinical education and training:
 - a) identification of safe water temperature ranges;
 - b) adjusting water flow and mixture to ensure water remains within the identified range; and
 - c) obtaining accurate water temperature measurements and documenting the same.
- 3.3 Health care providers demonstrate competency:
 - a) after orientation, prior to being allowed to assist with the first bath;

- b) following any policy breach; and
 - c) as deemed required by the supervising health care professional.
- 3.4 Any documentation related to safe water temperatures competency shall be maintained on the employee's human resources record.

4. Monitoring

- 4.1 If thermometers are used for measuring the water temperature they shall be:
- a) approved for that purpose; and
 - b) calibrated and maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- 4.2 In Continuing Care Designated Living Option, therapeutic tubs require:
- a) a daily water temperature check of the maximum hottest flowing water at each therapeutic tub shall be performed prior to the first bath of the day in each therapeutic tub, in accordance with the *AHS Safe Bath Temperatures and Frequency - Hottest Flowing Water Procedure*; and
 - b) management at each facility shall designate specific personnel as being responsible for performing the daily water temperature check for therapeutic tubs in that facility.
- 4.3 The water temperature for assisted bathing shall be monitored.
- a) Health care providers assisting patients with bathing shall ensure that the water temperature falls within safe water temperature range prior to the patient entering the bath or shower.
 - b) In Acute Care this can be done using a sensory check or an approved measuring device. For Continuing Care please see *AHS Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency Procedure PS-47-01*.
 - c) Where more than one (1) health care provider is assisting with the patient's bathing, one (1) staff member shall be identified as being ultimately responsible for regulating the water temperature, performing and recording the water temperature checks, and for bathing the patient.
 - d) If not contra-indicated by patient's health or other condition, invite the patient to check the water temperature using their forearm (intact skin only) before entering the tub or shower.
 - e) Observe and ask the patient, whenever possible, for any indication of discomfort related to the water temperature while getting into the tub or shower and during the bath.

- (i) Should the patient indicate that the temperature of the water is too hot:
 - the patient shall be immediately removed from the tub;
 - steps shall be taken to provide for the patient's immediate comfort and safety;
 - the patient shall be assessed for any reddening of the skin; and
 - the water temperature shall be measured to confirm it falls within the established safe water temperature range.
- f) In a Continuing Care Designated Living Option:
 - (i) water temperature measurement checks shall be performed a minimum of two (2) times in addition to one (1) sensory check for each bath in accordance with the AHS *Safe Bath Temperatures and Frequency Procedure*; and
 - (ii) water temperature measurement checks shall be performed a minimum of one (1) time in addition to two (2) sensory checks for each shower in accordance with the AHS *Safe Bath Temperatures and Frequency Procedure*.

5. Recording Information

- 5.1 When the patient requires assistance in bathing, this process shall be recorded in the patient's health record in accordance with other required documentation.
- 5.2 Patient and family education provided is to be documented in the patient's medical record.
- 5.3 In a Continuing Care Designated Living Option:
 - a) The required water temperature checks of each assisted bathing shall be documented according to the AHS *Safe Bath Temperatures and Frequency - Hottest Flowing Water* and the *Safe Bath Temperatures and Frequency Procedures*.
 - b) In common tub/shower areas, a bath/shower log shall be used for documenting the required water temperature checks for each patient bathing, and for recording the hottest flowing water temperature checks for therapeutic tubs, as applicable.
 - (i) The bath/shower log shall be kept in the tub/shower area.
 - (ii) Completed bath/shower logs shall be retained by the Site/Unit Manager for the current year plus five (5) years, and any other

requirements, in accordance with AHS *Records Management* Policy and associated procedures.

- c) For bathing provided in a tub/shower other than in a common tub/shower area, staff shall record the required water temperature checks in a file, book or log or as determined by the Site/Unit Manager.
 - (i) Completed bath/shower logs shall be retained by the Site/Unit Manager for the current year plus five (5) years, and any other requirements, in accordance with AHS *Records Management* Policy and associated procedures; and/or
 - (ii) Completed bath/shower logs shall be sent to AHS for filing and retention, in accordance with AHS *Records Management* Policy and associated procedures.
- d) The patient's preference for method and frequency of bathing shall be documented in the patient's care plan.

6. Bathing Frequency

- 6.1 All patients who require assistance in bathing shall be provided the opportunity for bathing/showering as clinically deemed appropriate and based on patient's preference.
- 6.2 All patients in a Continuing Care Designated Living Option shall be provided the opportunity for bathing, at a minimum, twice a week by the method of their preference and more frequently when determined by the patient's **care plan**.

7. Patient and Family Education

- 7.1 Information about safe bathing water temperature should be provided to the patient and family when the patient requires assistance in bathing.
- 7.2 The Health Care Professional ensures the parent/caregiver is knowledgeable of safe bathing procedures and able to perform the task safely prior to a parent/caregiver bathing infant/pediatric patients in an AHS facility.

7.3 Continuing Care

- a) Information about safe bathing water temperature shall be provided to the patient and family during the admission/transition period, unless the patient doesn't require assistance in bathing.
- b) Information on the offering of bathing twice a week or more as determined by the patient's assessed need(s) and personal preference(s) shall be provided to the patient and family:
 - (i) during the admission/transition period to the Continuing Care Designated Living Option; or
 - (ii) at the time of the first bathing provided to the patient.

8. Incident Reporting

- 8.1 Any deviation from this policy causing a patient safety concern shall be reported according to the reportable incidents process as outlined in the AHS *Recognizing and Responding to Hazards, Close Calls and Clinical Adverse Events* Policy.
- 8.2 In Continuing Care:
 - a) Any variation from the established safe water temperature involving a patient or staff member shall be reported in accordance with applicable operator, Zone and the provincial *Continuing Care Health Service Standards*.

DEFINITIONS

Assisted bathing means, for the purposes of this document suite only, bathing where a patient is not able to bath or shower independently and/or needs assistance to get into or out of the tub or shower.

Bathing means, for the purposes of this document suite only, tub baths, showers, full body sponge baths or bed baths.

Care plan means, a specific health record which identifies the patient's personalized plan of care.

Continuing care means, for the purposes of this document suite only, Home Living, Supportive Living, Facility Living/Long-Term Care, hospice, and adult day program spaces.

Continuing Care Designated Living Option (Designated Living Option) means, for the purposes of this document suite only, residential accommodation that provides publicly funded health and social services appropriate to meet the patient's Assessed Unmet Needs. The level of care is accessed through a standardized assessment and single point of entry process and

consists of Designated Supportive Living Levels 3, Designated Supportive Living Levels 4, Designated Supportive Living Levels 4 Dementia, and Facility Living/Long-Term Care spaces.

Health care professional means an individual who is a member of a regulated health discipline as defined by the *Health Disciplines Act* [Alberta] or the *Health Professions Act* [Alberta], and who practises within scope and role.

Health care provider means any person who provides goods or services to a patient, inclusive of health care professionals, staff, students, volunteers and other persons acting on behalf of or in conjunction with Alberta Health Services.

Patient means all persons who receive or have requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers and also means, where applicable:

- a) a co-decision-maker with the person; or
- b) an alternate decision-maker on behalf of the person.

Therapeutic tub means, for the purposes of this document suite only, a tub in which a patient is lifted into or it is fully accessible, often by a side door, which may or may not include a reservoir for water, jets, hydro massage or hydro sound. The patient is assisted to bathe in a therapeutic tub and the water temperature is regulated by the tub and/or the staff member. This is not a residential type tub. Examples include: Arjo, Century, Parker, Rhapsody, Freedom, Advantage, Serenity, Bellentra or Primo tub.

REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
 - *Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency Procedure* (#PS-47-01)
 - *Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency - Hottest Flowing Water Procedure* (#PS-47-02)
 - *Records Management Policy* (#PS-1133)
 - *Recognizing and Responding to Hazards, Close Calls and Clinical Adverse Events Policy* (#PS-95)
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents
 - *Continuing Care Health Service Standards* (Alberta Health)
 - *Long-Term Care Accommodation Standards* (Alberta Health)
 - *Supportive Living Accommodation Standards* (Alberta Health)

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