

## Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services Risk Management

**Subject:** DEHYDRATION

### What is it?

A person needs a certain amount of fluids; mostly water, for the systems in their body to work properly. Not enough fluids can affect every system in the body including the heart, kidneys and even the lungs. It can even effect how well their medication works. When a person loses water from their body more quickly than they take it into their body, a problem can occur. This can happen quickly or slowly. It is called **dehydration** and it is a big health problem

### **Causes of fluid loss or dehydration include:**

- Loose watery bowel movements/vomiting
- Less fluid intake
- Some medications like “water pills”
- Too much of a medication in someone’s blood
- Infections
- Need other people for food and drink
- Fever
- Some health problems like Diabetes
- Hot weather or a long time in a hot place
- Exercise that causes too much sweating
- Fast breathing for a long time

### What risk does it present?

Not enough fluids can affect every system in the body including the heart, kidneys and even the lungs causing them to stop working properly or to stop working altogether.

### How is it managed?

Be alert to signs of dehydration. The sooner you are able to intervene the better.

### **Signs of fluid loss or dehydration include:**

- Dry skin and dry cracked lips
- Less elasticity to the skin
- Going to the bathroom less often
- Strong-smelling, dark brown or dark yellow urine
- Less urine
- Fast weight loss
- Doesn’t want to participate in activities
- Sleepy, hard to wake up
- Fast heartbeat, low blood pressure
- Fever
- Reddened skin or yellowish color to skin
- Sunken eyes

**Call 911** if the person is:

- Blue, can't talk or make a sound or is not breathing (**Attempt Heimlich Maneuver**)
- Having difficulty breathing
- Looks very ill

**When you think there may be a problem:**

- Call or talk to your nurse or supervisor
- If the person is sick, call the doctor
- Give small amounts of fluid often
- Write down the amount of their urine or bowel movement and how much the person drinks and eats. The amount of fluid being taken in should be close the amount of fluid being excreted.
- Make sure the room is not too hot or too cold and the person is wearing the right kind of clothes Talk to other staff about what you see

**Where and to whom do these recommendations and protocols apply?**

- This protocol applies to any individual supported by the Department of Developmental Services
- Information regarding the individual's status relative to this issue is to be handled in the same manner as any medical information according to HIPAA regulations.

**Where can I find additional help?**

- DPH – [www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph)
- NIH – [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)
- DDS – Health and Wellness Promotion: [www.mass.gov/dds](http://www.mass.gov/dds)