

Falls in hospital settings

Falls can happen during a hospital stay, particularly when people are unwell or recovering from illness. Find out how learning from falls helps improve patient safety across Northern Ireland.

Who is this page for?

- **Patients** – to understand why falls happen in hospital and how staff work to reduce the risk
- **Families and Carers** – to learn how they can support someone in hospital and understand how hospitals improve care after falls occur
- **Health and Social Care Professionals** – to access regional guidance, shared learning and improvement resources
- **Partner organisations** – to understand the role of the Public Health Agency and the Regional Inpatient Falls Prevention Group

What is an inpatient fall?

An inpatient fall is when a person accidentally comes to rest on the floor or another lower level while receiving care in hospital.

Falls can happen for many reasons. A person may be unwell, recovering from surgery, taking medicines that affect balance, or become confused or weak during their hospital stay.

Although many falls do not cause injury, some can result in serious harm and may affect a person's recovery and confidence.

Why is preventing falls important?

Preventing falls is an important part of providing safe, high-quality care.

Hospitals work to reduce falls by:

- assessing each patient's risk
- providing the right support and equipment
- reviewing medicines where appropriate
- keeping care environments as safe as possible
- involving patients and families in care.

Not every fall can be prevented, but many can be reduced through good assessment, communication and safe care.

How can patients and families help?

Patients and families have an important role in preventing falls.

You can help by:

- asking for assistance if needed
- using walking aids as advised
- wearing suitable footwear
- keeping glasses and hearing aids close by
- telling staff if you feel dizzy or unsteady
- using the call bell before getting out of bed if you need help.

Learning from falls

When someone falls in hospital, healthcare teams do more than respond to the immediate incident.

They review what happened to understand:

- why the fall occurred
- whether there were any contributing factors
- what could be improved
- whether learning could help prevent similar falls in the future.

Learning from falls is an important part of improving patient safety.

Access [Learning Matters Newsletter | HSC Public Health Agency](#).

How does shared learning improve care?

Looking at learning from many hospitals helps identify patterns that may not be obvious from a single incident.

For example, shared learning may highlight opportunities to improve:

- communication between staff
- falls risk assessment and care planning
- the hospital environment
- staff education and training
- use of equipment
- patient and family involvement

Sharing this learning across Northern Ireland helps hospitals learn from each other and continuously improve care.

The Regional Inpatient Falls Prevention Group

The Regional Inpatient Falls Prevention Group brings together representatives from Health and Social Care Trusts and partner organisations across Northern Ireland.

The Group supports a consistent regional approach to inpatient falls prevention by:

- sharing learning
- reviewing guidance
- promoting evidence-based practice
- supporting quality improvement
- encouraging collaboration across organisations.

Key resources



Falls prevention in hospital: information for patients and visitors

To reduce the risk of falls, please follow the advice in this leaflet.

Health and Social Care

Public Health Agency

GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF FALLS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY - INPATIENT SETTING ONLY

Types of Falls Assistive Technology

The following are common types of assistive technology that are often used within inpatient settings. Most companies will supply wired and wireless versions:

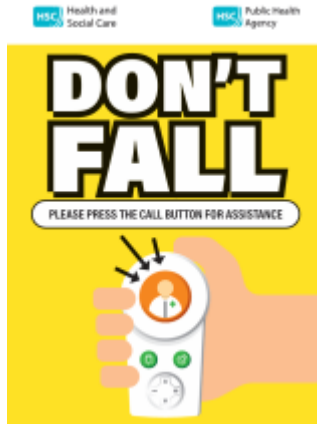
- Clip and cord
- Chair exit alarm
- Bed exit alarm
- Floor exit alarm
- Infra-red beams

Many of these devices have different methods of raising an alert such as:

- Audible alarm
- Silent alarm with patient - staff carry a pager which can be set to audible or vibrate
- Voice recorded alarms
- Display panels / screens

Guidelines on the use of falls assistive technology - inpatient setting only

Guidance for inpatient setting only.



Don't fall: press the call button for assistance

Poster for use in hospital settings.

How does the Public Health Agency support this work?

The Public Health Agency works with Health and Social Care Trusts across Northern Ireland to support continuous learning and improvement in falls prevention.

Through the Regional Inpatient Falls Prevention Group, the PHA:

- brings together learning from hospitals across Northern Ireland
- identifies common themes and opportunities for improvement
- supports the development of regional guidance and resources
- promotes education and good practice
- shares learning between organisations
- supports the use of evidence and data to improve patient safety.

Information for professionals

- [HSC Falls severity grading of injury \(April 2024\)](#)
- [Don't fall: press the call button for assistance | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Falls workshop part 1_ Implementing FallsSafe bundle_Frances Healy](#)
- [Falls workshop part 2_ What was difficult about FallsSafe approach_Frances Healy](#)
- [FallsSafe falls prevention resources | RCP](#)
- [Falls: assessment and prevention in older people and in people 50 and over at higher risk | Guidance | NICE](#)
- [Frailty Network Northern Ireland | Frailty Network](#)

- [Learning Matters Newsletter | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

Last reviewed

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