

# Safe Work Practice: Using Mechanical Patient Lifts in Medical Clinics

## Purpose

To ensure the safe operation of mechanical patient lifts.

## Scope

This procedure applies to staff who assist patients using manual or powered sling lifts (i.e., portable sling lifts or ceiling-mounted lifts) in medical clinics. This procedure does not apply to sit-to-stand lifts.

## Hazards

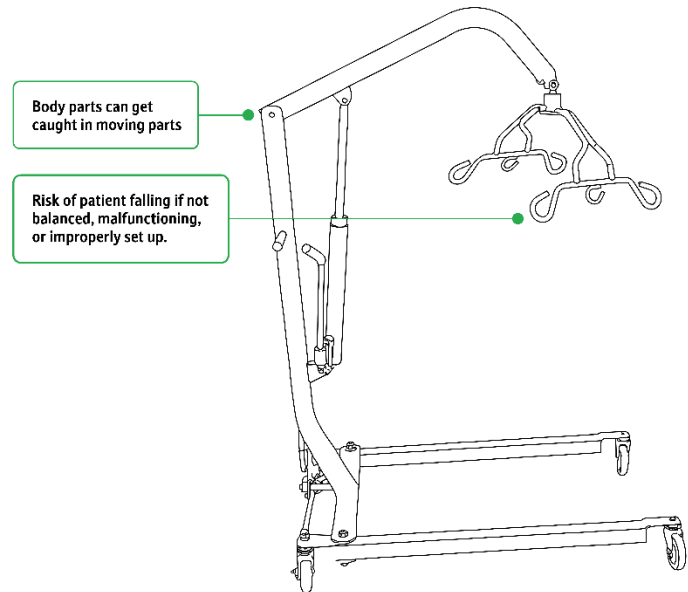
- **Musculoskeletal Injury:** Patients can suddenly fall from mechanical lifting devices if the device is improperly balanced, malfunctioning, or improperly set up (e.g., the patient is placed in the wrong size of sling). Strains and sprains, contusions, and broken bones may result if staff attempt to catch or rebalance a falling patient.
- **Pinch and Crush Injuries:** Body parts (e.g., fingers, hair) may become caught in moving parts of the mechanical lift, especially the joint of the suspension arm, which can cause cuts, broken blood vessels or bones, and, in extreme situations, amputations. Refer to the manufacturer's manual for a complete diagram and safety information specific to each mechanical lift.

Hazards when using mechanical patient lift

## Safe Work Practices

### General Precautions

- Ask patients who can move independently to self-transfer onto the exam table or chair. Offer transfer or slide boards if available and clinically appropriate.
- Use mechanical lifts to assist patients who cannot move independently. Work in teams of two or more staff members to ensure staff and patient safety during the movement.
- Each mechanical lift must be clearly labeled. The label must include:
  - Critical safety warnings.
  - The weight limit (i.e., the maximum capacity of the lift).
  - The model name, serial number, and date of manufacture.
  - Date of last preventative maintenance.



- Contact information for the manufacturer.
- For electrically powered or battery-operated lifts:
  - Take note of the emergency stop buttons, which are red and typically have a yellow ring around them.
  - Battery operated lifts will have a warning sound or light when the charge is too low to safely perform a lift. Do not use the lift until the battery is recharged.
  - Keep electrical cords out of the path that staff will need to travel.
- Keep the manufacturer's manual in an easily accessible location near the lift. If the manual is digital, ensure all staff have access to the file.
- Use only the original equipment supplied for the lift or replacement parts from the manufacturer. Third-party or improvised replacement parts may not work as the manufacturer intended and may not meet safety requirements.

### Inspection

- Examine all parts of the mechanical lift before using it on a patient.
  - For fabric slings, look for signs of frayed material, weak stitching, tears, holes, and changes in texture (e.g., thickness, smoothness).
  - For metal parts, look for signs of rust, corrosion, and overly loose or stiff connections. Check that screws and bolts are tightened.
  - Attach the sling and test that the hooks keep the sling in place.
  - Test that movable parts open to their usual position and do not collapse or get stuck. Push and pull the lift on the floor or in its track to ensure it moves easily.
  - Check that all buttons are working.
  - Notify the supervisor and/or employer immediately of any issue found during an inspection. **Do not use the lift until it is fixed.**
- At least once per year, or sooner if specified by the manufacturer, the lift must be inspected in detail following instructions listed in the manufacturer's manual.
  - Run the lift at least once during the detailed inspection at its maximum weight capacity. More information on testing methods can be found in the manufacturer's manual or in [CAN/CSA-Z10535-03 \(2014\)](#).
  - Report issues found during the detailed inspection to the employer right away. Do not use the lift until fixed.
  - Keep records of detailed inspections and any maintenance actions in a logbook near the lift.

### Safe Use

- Conduct a Point of Care Risk Assessment before loading a patient into a lift:
  - Is the patient within the acceptable weight limit for the device?
  - Is appropriately sized equipment available?
  - Are enough trained staff, including yourself, available to assist?
  - Is the patient able to follow instructions and cooperative?

- Is there enough time to safely perform the task?
  - Is the room appropriately set up for the task?
- During the use of a mechanical lift:
  - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for safe use.
  - Supervise patients and instruct them to stay still.
  - Raise the patient as little as possible. Limit the distance the lift is moved.
  - Do not move the lift over a bump or uneven flooring.

### **Cleaning and Storage**

- Clean and disinfect the lift between patients, before placing the lift in storage, and when the lift is visibly dirty. Mark lifts that are waiting to be cleaned as contaminated, using a laminated sign.
- Use the manufacturer's recommended cleaning products, methods, and schedule. Using alternative products and methods may damage the lift.
- Store portable lifts away from foot traffic when not in use. Use dust covers if available.

### **First Aid Treatment**

Staff who become injured while using a mechanical lift must report the injury to their employer and seek first aid.

### **Training**

Employers must ensure that staff are trained in the safe operation and inspection requirements of the lift before use. Staff must also demonstrate safe use of the lift before independently operating the lifting device with a patient.

### **Annual Review**

This policy and procedure will be reviewed and updated as needed.

### **References**

- [WorkSafeBC - Occupational Health and Safety Regulations – Cranes and Hoists](#)
- [WorkSafe BC – Occupational Health and Safety Regulations - Ergonomics](#)
- [WorkSafe BC - Patient Handling: Assessing the Risks](#)

### **Approval**

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|-----------|-------|
| Employer: | Date: |
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