

TITLE

SAFE BATHING TEMPERATURES AND FREQUENCYSCOPE

Provincial: Continuing Care

DOCUMENT

PS-47-01

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Vice President, Systems Innovation & Programs

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Safe Bathing Temperatures Policy (#PS-47)

SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE

December 2, 2022

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 **Continuing Care** settings where **health care providers** perform **assisted bathing**.
- To provide current best practice direction on safe water temperature ranges for assisted bathing (adults and pediatrics) in Continuing Care.
- To align with the AHS *Safe Bathing Temperatures* Policy.

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).

ELEMENTS**1. Points of Emphasis**

- 1.1 **Designated Living Option (DLO)** settings shall provide **patients** with the opportunity for bathing at a minimum twice per week by the method of their preference, and more frequently when determined by the patient's care plan. Refer to AHS *Safe Bathing Temperatures* Policy.
- 1.2 Health care providers in DLO settings shall confirm on a daily basis that the hottest flowing water measurement for all **therapeutic tubs** does not exceed 49 degrees Celsius prior to assisted bathing as per the AHS *Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency - Hottest Flowing Water for Therapeutic Tubs* Procedure.

- 1.3 Health care providers shall receive education on safe bathing practices and shall be deemed competent prior to performing assisted bathing.
- 1.4 **Health care professionals** shall assess the unmet needs and preferences of patients, including preferred and required water temperatures prior to assisted bathing. Bathing preferences shall be confirmed with the patient and/or **family** and noted on the patient's care plan.
- 1.5 The care plan shall direct the level of supervision and assistance the patient requires with all bathing related activities, and shall be communicated to all health care providers performing assisting bathing.
- 1.6 Instructions for assisted bathing and equipment operation shall be readily accessible. A process for identifying temperature limitations and required checks should be placed in bath areas within DLO settings or be made available in the home in Home Care settings (refer to Appendix A: *Water Temperature Check Process*).

2. Safe Assisted Bathing Water Temperatures

- 2.1 Assisted bathing temperatures shall never exceed 43 degrees Celsius.
- 2.2 The acceptable water temperature range for assisted bathing of patients age 12 years and younger (pediatric patient) should be no higher than 38 degrees Celsius (36.7 to 38 degrees Celsius is considered best practice).
- 2.3 The acceptable water temperature range for assisted bathing of patients age 13 and older is 38 to 43 degrees Celsius.

3. Thermometers

- 3.1 Thermometers used for measuring assisted bathing water temperature shall be:
 - a) approved for that purpose; and
 - b) calibrated and maintained according to manufacturer instruction.
- 3.2 Thermometers recommended for measuring assisted bathing water temperature for patients 13 years or older include:
 - a) **integrated tub thermometer**;
 - b) hand held thermometer; or
 - c) thermometer card that has been pre-set to measure the acceptable water temperature range of 38 to 43 degrees Celsius.

- 3.3 An integrated tub thermometer or a hand held thermometer shall be used for measuring the assisted bathing water temperature for patients age 12 years or younger.

4. Patient Safety

- 4.1 When the patient age 12 years and younger prefers or is assessed as requiring a water temperature outside of the temperature range established in Section 2.2 (e.g., 12 year old prefers a higher temperature), the water temperature shall only be adjusted if the preference can be safely accommodated.
- 4.2 If the patient's preferred method of bathing is deemed unsafe, the health care professional shall discuss those concerns with the patient and family (if applicable) and should consult with the **accountable leader** on how to proceed.
- 4.3 Managed risk agreements shall not be used to circumvent any municipal bylaw, provincial, or federal law, and are not appropriate for documenting temperature preferences, or to permit assisted bathing when a patient desires a temperature exceeding 43 degrees Celsius.
- 4.4 If a patient indicates (or shows signs) that the temperature of the water is too hot during assisted bathing, the health care provider shall follow steps in Section 8.

5. Rear or Side Opening Tubs - Water Temperature Checks

- 5.1 The health care provider shall adhere to the following water temperature check process for assisted baths in a rear or side-opening tub (e.g., Parker tub):
- a) turn on the water, using a controlled mixture of hot and cold;
 - b) while the water is running, measure the water temperature with the appropriate thermometer (see Section 3) until the temperature reading is steady and at the appropriate level (Check 1);
 - c) assist the patient into the tub;
 - d) immerse the inside of forearm into the water and check the temperature constantly while the tub fills (Check 2);
 - e) once the tub is filled, swirl water and measure the water temperature again with the appropriate thermometer (see Section 3) until the temperature reading is steady and at the appropriate level (Check 3);
 - f) confirm with the patient throughout that the temperature is comfortably warm but not hot by observing and asking for any discomfort; and
 - (i) if the patient relates the temperature is too hot or if scalding or burns are suspected, refer to Section 8.

- g) record the date, time, and temperature of each check.

6. Bath - Water Temperature Checks

- 6.1 The health care provider shall adhere to the following water temperature check process for assisted baths:
- a) turn on water, using a controlled mixture of hot and cold;
 - b) while the water is running, measure the water temperature with the appropriate thermometer (see Section 3) until the temperature reading is steady and at the appropriate level (Check 1);
 - c) fill tub to an appropriate level or as per patient preference;
 - d) turn water off;
 - e) swirl water;
 - f) measure the water temperature with the appropriate thermometer (see Section 3) until the temperature reading is steady and at the appropriate level (Check 2);
 - g) immediately prior to patient and water contact, immerse the inside of forearm and hold in the water for at least five (5) seconds. Water temperature should feel comfortably warm but not hot (Check 3);
 - h) if not contra-indicated by the patient's health or other condition, invite patient to immerse the inside of their forearm for five (5) seconds immediately prior to contact with the water;
 - i) assist the patient into the tub or begin bathing;
 - j) confirm with the patient throughout that the temperature is comfortably warm but not hot by observing and/or asking for any discomfort; and
 - (i) if the patient relates the temperature is too hot or if scalding or burns are suspected, refer to Section 8.
 - k) record the date, time, and temperature checks.

7. Shower - Water Temperature Checks

- 7.1 The health care provider shall adhere to the following water temperature check process for assisted showers:
- a) turn on the water, using a controlled mixture of hot and cold;

- b) after 60 seconds of run time, check the water temperature by immersing the inside of forearm in the water stream for at least five (5) seconds. Water temperature should feel comfortably warm but not hot (Check 1);
- c) measure the water temperature with the appropriate thermometer (see Section 3) while water is running until the temperature reading is steady and at the appropriate level (Check 2);
- d) immediately prior to patient and water contact, immerse the inside of forearm again and hold in the water for at least five (5) seconds. Water temperature should feel comfortably warm but not hot (Check 3);
- e) if not contra-indicated by the patient's health or other condition, invite patient to immerse the inside of their forearm for five (5) seconds immediately prior to entering the water;
- f) assist the patient into the shower;
- g) confirm with the patient throughout that the temperature is still comfortably warm but not hot by observing the patient and/or asking for any discomfort; and
 - (i) if the patient relates the temperature is too hot or if scalding or burns are suspected, refer to Section 8.
- h) record the date, time, and temperature checks.

8. Immediate Response

- 8.1 Should the patient indicate that the temperature of the water is too hot during assisted bathing, the health care provider shall observe for indications of scalds or burns (e.g., reddening of the skin).
- 8.2 If there is no indication of scalds or burns, offer to re-adjust the water temperature for the patient and repeat steps listed in the appropriate section for type of assisted bathing water temperature check (Section 5, 6, or 7, respectively).
- 8.3 If there is indication of scalds or burns, cease assisted bathing activities.
 - (i) The patient shall be immediately treated for scalding/burning.
 - (ii) Assessment, ongoing care, notifications and reporting shall be performed by the health care professional and accountable leader, as required, in accordance with the AHS *Recognizing and Responding to Hazards, Close Calls and Clinical Adverse Event Policy Suite*.

9. Incident Reporting

- 9.1 Any variation from the established safe water temperature involving a patient or staff member shall be reported in accordance with applicable operator, Zone and *Continuing Care Health Service Standards* requirements.

DEFINITIONS

Accountable leader means the individual who has ultimate accountability to ensure consideration and completion of the listed steps in the management of Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency. Responsibility for some or all of the components of management may be delegated to the appropriate level responsible administrative leader, but accountability remains at the senior level.

Assisted bathing for the purposed 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.

Continuing Care means an integrated range of services supporting the health and wellbeing of individuals living in their own home, a supportive living or long-term care setting. Continuing care patients are not defined by age, diagnosis or the length of time they may require service, but by their need for care.

Designated living option (DLO) means residential accommodation in the Continuing Care system that provides publicly funded health and support 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 Level 3 (DSL3), Designated Supportive Living Level 4 (DSL4) and Designated Supportive Living Level 4 Dementia (DSL4D) and Long Term Care (LTC).

Family(ies) means one or more individuals identified by the patient as an important support, and who the patient wishes to be included in any encounters with the health care system, including, but not limited to, family members, legal guardians, friends and informal caregivers.

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 acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services who is providing a good or a service 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.

Integrated tub thermometer means, for the purposes of this document suite only, a device that controls or restricts the hot water for baths or showers. This may include, though is not limited to, mixing valves, scald free taps, and automatic shut-off systems.

Patient means all persons; inclusive of residents and clients who receive or have requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers. Patient 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

- Appendix A: *Water Temperature Check Process*
- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
 - *Managed Risk Agreement Guideline (#PS-102-01)*
 - *Patient Concerns Resolution Policy Suite*
 - *Recognizing and Responding to Hazards, Close Calls and Clinical Adverse Events Policy Suite*
 - *Safe Bathing Temperatures Policy (#PS-47)*
 - *Safe Bathing Temperatures and Frequency - Hottest Flowing Water Procedure (#PS-47- 02)*
- Alberta Health Services Forms:
 - *Safe Bathing Competency Checklist (#08932)*
 - *Safe Bathing Water Temperature Check Log (#08926)*
- 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)*
 - *Reportable Incident Reporting Process (Alberta Health)*

VERSION HISTORY

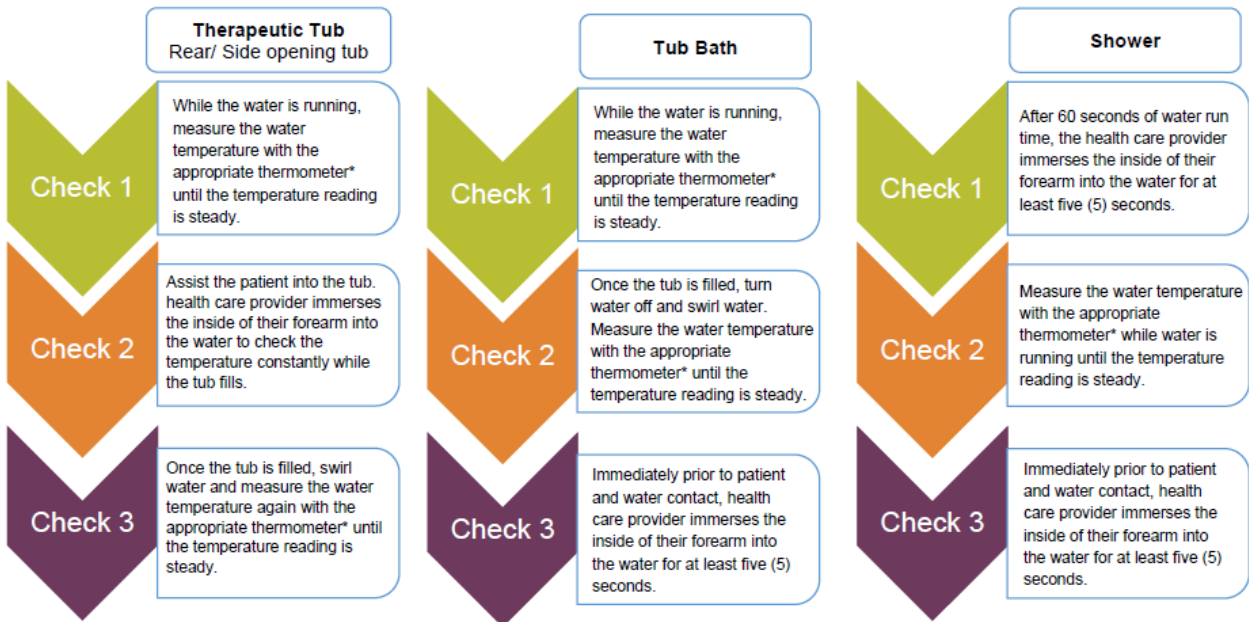
Date	Action Taken
March 5, 2014	Revised
November 5, 2014	Revised
April 7, 2017	Revised, includes change in Title from "Safe Bath Temperatures"
December 2, 2019	Revised

APPENDIX A



Water Temperature Check Process

Patients 12 years and younger: temperature range of **36.7° to 38° Celsius**
 Patients 13 years and older: temperature range of **38° to 43° Celsius**
 Hottest flowing water temperature for therapeutic tubs in a Continuing Care Designated Living Option is maximum **49° Celsius**



- * Appropriate thermometers:
- Adult & pediatric patients 13 years or older: Integrated tub or shower thermometer, hand held thermometer or bath thermometer cards pre-set to measure the acceptable water temperature range of 38 to 43°Celsius.
 - Pediatric patients 12 years or younger: integrated tub or hand held thermometer

Reminder:
If not contraindicated, invite the patient to immerse the inside of their forearm prior to entering the water.