



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT ON DISABILITY SERVICES

DDS TRANSMITTAL #19-3

TO: All Developmental Disabilities Administration Residential and Day Services Providers

FROM: Erin Leveton, Deputy Director for the Quality Assurance & Performance Management Administration

DATE: March 15, 2019

RE: Choking/Aspiration Risk After the Use of Anesthesia or Sedation

The Department on Disability Services (DDS), Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), is sharing this transmittal to raise awareness of the increased risk of choking or aspiration for people who are within 24 hours post-procedure with an anesthetic or use of sedation. The use of anesthesia diminishes the body's reflexes, which includes the gag reflex, and makes it difficult for someone to protect their airway. Additionally, in certain procedures such as an upper endoscopy, a spray is used to numb the back of the throat to eliminate the gag reflex. Certain foods that may have been tolerated by the person previously may present an increased risk of choking or aspiration following the use of anesthesia or sedation. You should always talk to the person's physician or dentist following any procedure where there was the use of anesthesia or sedation regarding any dietary change that may be needed.

As you are aware, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities may be at a greater risk of choking. There are certain types of foods that generally can cause an increased risk of choking:

- Items that when combined can form a bolus that may block the trachea like peanut butter, bread and honey, and waffles and syrup;
- Round, slippery and firm foods like whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, cherries and olives, hard candies, chunks of cheese, and nuts; and
- Hard to chew items like tough meats, raw vegetables like carrots, raw fruit - especially with the skin on like apples- as well as popcorn and chips.

This does not mean that people we support cannot eat and enjoy these items, but it does mean that extra care and preparation may be needed when serving these foods. For example, grapes and cherry tomatoes may need to be cut in half and hot dogs may need to be cut length-wise.

However, these foods should be avoided for 24 hours after any procedure where anesthesia



or sedation was used. Even more time may be recommended to avoid these foods based upon the person's health and their physician's or dentist's directions.

If at any time there is a change in a person's eating habits or a noted change in swallowing, quick action may be needed to ensure the person's health and safety. If the person has difficulty breathing, you should call 911 immediately.

If you have any questions about this transmittal, please contact DDS's Chioma Nwachukwu, DNP, RN, APHN-BC, Supervisory Nurse Consultant, at (202) 615-8268 or at chioma.nwachukwu@dc.gov.

In closing, DDS thanks the members of the Mortality Review Committee for their recommendation regarding the need to share this information.