

Staff Education

The following section regarding staff education has been developed to facilitate implementation of the patient alert wristband standardization project in Tennessee hospitals and other healthcare facilities. Facilities may select those materials they believe would be most beneficial in assisting in the education of staff at their institutions or elect to modify the materials presented.

The decision on how to implement standardized patient alert wristbands will be unique to each hospital, and the education process can be either formal or informal. Suggested methods that can be used to ensure staff receive the appropriate education and training include unit or department staff meetings, education sessions, online modules and annual competency checklists. Organizations should consider introducing new staff to the hospital's policies and procedures related to use of color-coded patient alert wristbands during initial hospital orientation.

A sample PowerPoint® presentation and sample brochure that can be used with hospital staff is available on the THA web site at www.tha.com and the Tennessee Center for Patient Safety web site at www.tnpatientsafety.com.

Preparation for Getting Started: Identify Other Key Participants

- While nurses will likely be the designated staff person placing alert wristbands on patients, remember that unit clerks may be involved in the process as well. For example, as unit clerks compile the medical record or review orders, they might assist the nurse in identifying particular medical conditions that warrant the use of a color-coded patient alert wristband.
- Remember to educate environmental service staff as they often are present in patient rooms. If environmental service staff is made aware that yellow alert wristbands signify a patient is at risk for falls, they can alert appropriate staff and help prevent patient harm or injury.
- Remember to educate dietary staff. A red alert wristband indicates the patient has some type of allergy, which may not be limited to medications. **A red alert wristband could alert dietary staff to consider whether the patient has food allergies.**
- Consider other staff throughout the facility where patients may undergo diagnostic testing or other procedures. They should be aware of what the patient alert wristband colors mean and how they will act on that visual cue in their respective departments before performing scheduled tests or procedures.

- Do not make assumptions that the entire hospital staff has knowledge of the color-coded patient alert wristbands. Be sure to consider medical staff, residents and students who provide care to patients.

Getting Started

- **Start with a Story.** Individuals need to know why they should do something; simply telling them they need to adopt a practice “because it is hospital policy” is not sufficient to achieve high levels of compliance. A story can provide context and help hospital staff understand why it is important to comply with hospital policies and procedures.

In December 2005, the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority issued an advisory based on an incident or “near miss” report. This advisory, which has received national attention, described an incident that occurred in a Pennsylvania hospital in which clinicians nearly failed to rescue a patient experiencing a cardiopulmonary arrest. The source of the confusion was a nurse who had incorrectly placed a yellow wristband on the patient.

In the hospital where the patient was admitted, a yellow wristband meant “do-not-resuscitate.” However, at a nearby hospital where the nurse was also employed, a yellow wristband meant “restricted extremity,” which is what the nurse wanted to alert hospital staff about. Fortunately, another nurse recognized the mistake, and the patient was resuscitated.

This “near miss” occurrence highlights a potential source of confusion and an opportunity to improve patient safety by reevaluating the use of color-coded wristbands. This event also underscores the importance of bringing near miss events to the attention of the hospital so that all such health care providers can learn from these events.

Since this event, there have been national efforts to adopt a standardized set of colors that all hospitals and other health care providers should use to indicate certain medical conditions.

- **Stress the “Big Picture” on Compliance with Standardization.** Providing context for why it is important to participate in a statewide effort may provide incentive for compliance. Explain to staff that this initiative is part of a statewide and national effort aimed at standardizing the colors of patient alert wristbands. Organizations may elect to use this as an opportunity to explain more about how standardization can make a huge impact on improving patient safety and encourage staff to consider other processes of care that would be amenable to standardization across the organization.
- **Introduce the Colors.** Review with staff the three wristbands, color designation and corresponding meaning.

NOTE: Even though Tennessee hospitals may use different vendors, it is important to use the same color shade for each alert wristband as designated in this toolkit.

- **Utilize the Other Parts of this Toolkit.** Use the Frequently Asked Questions section to explain why certain colors were selected.
- **Stress the Risk Reduction Strategies.** The risk reduction strategies included throughout this document should be shared with hospital staff.
- **Explain the Process for Educating Patients.** You can mention to staff that there is a patient/family education brochure that can be used if you believe your organization would find this useful. The following is a sample script that can be used by staff when talking to a patient or family members.

Q. What is a color-coded patient alert wristband?

A. Color-coded patient alert wristbands are used in hospitals to quickly communicate a patient's health care status or medical condition. **Alert wristbands are used by hospital staff to help provide the best possible care.**

Q. What do the colors mean?

A. RED means ALLERGY; YELLOW means FALL RISK; and PURPLE means DO-NOT-RESUSCITATE

- **ALLERGY** – If a patient has an allergy to anything, including food, medicine, dust, grass, or animals, please tell us. Knowledge of any type of allergy could be very important to the care that a patient receives.
- **FALL RISK** – Our hospital wants to prevent falls at all times. Nurses assess patients all the time to determine if they need extra help and attention in order to prevent a fall. Sometimes, a person may become weakened during their illness or because they just had surgery. When a patient is wearing this wristband, it alerts all staff that the patient needs to be assisted when walking or getting up from lying down.
- **DNR** – Some patients have indicated that they would prefer that certain measures to extend life, such as trying to resuscitate them if they stop breathing, not be performed. It is our responsibility to ensure that we honor these kinds of decisions that have been made by patients when they seek care at our facility.

- **Review with Staff the Following Key Points.** The items listed below are part of the competency expectations associated with this initiative. Therefore, it is important that hospital staff has a good understanding of these key points. If your hospital policy will be modified to include certain key points, make sure the competency form given to staff reflects these changes.
 - What do the colors mean?
 - Who can apply the wristband to the patient?
 - When in the course of care are wristbands applied?
 - What is hospital policy on the removal of “social cause” wristbands?
 - What is the process for patient education and how is this information conveyed to patients and families?
 - What is the policy on reapplication of wristbands?
 - What is the policy for communication of wristband use during patient transfers, handoffs or at change of shift?
 - What is the policy for patient refusal to comply with hospital wristband policy?
 - What is the policy for removal of wristbands prior to discharge of patients to home or other postacute care facilities?

Risk Reduction Strategies Staff Should Know

Color-Coded Patient Alert Wristbands/Risk Reduction Strategies

Quick Reference Card

- 1. Use wristbands with the alert message preprinted (such as DNR).**
- 2. Remove any “social cause” colored wristbands (such as LIVESTRONG).**
- 3. Remove wristbands that have been applied by another facility, except for emergency identification bands.**
- 4. Initiate banding upon admission, changes in condition or receipt of information during the hospital stay.**
- 5. Educate patients and family members regarding the wristbands.**
- 6. Coordinate chart/white board/care plan/door signage information/stickers with same color coding.**
- 7. Educate staff to verify color-coded patient alert wristbands upon assessment and during handoff of care and facility transfer communication.**