

## **APPENDIX 12**

### **Guidance on the use of Lap belts on wheelchairs**

A lap belt fitted to a wheelchair is intended to provide safe and adequate seating for wheelchair users to prevent them from sliding or falling out of a wheelchair. It may be necessary for short periods of time for a patient to use a wheelchair fitted with a lapbelt for health and safety reasons especially when accessing outdoor areas; This is due to the risks of accidental falls out of the chair going up and down slopes and the unpredictability of paving surfaces. The patient's condition may also mean that they are at risk of injury if they do not use a lapbelt i.e. patient has a poor sitting balance.

When the patient has capacity they should be involved in the decision about whether the lap belt is used, there should be a detailed explanation and consultation with the patient. If following assessment, the patient is deemed to lack capacity to make that specific decision concerning a lapbelt, then a best interest decision would need to take into account all relevant factors and this would need to be documented. If the use of a lap belt is deemed necessary and the in the patient's best interests for short periods of time to support them, then it would not be a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards issue.

A lap belt should never be used as a form of restraint. Staff should consider whether the use of a lap belt constitutes a deprivation of liberty and make a decision with the Multi-disciplinary team if it is to be used, and this should be clearly documented in the patient record.

### **Risk Assessment**

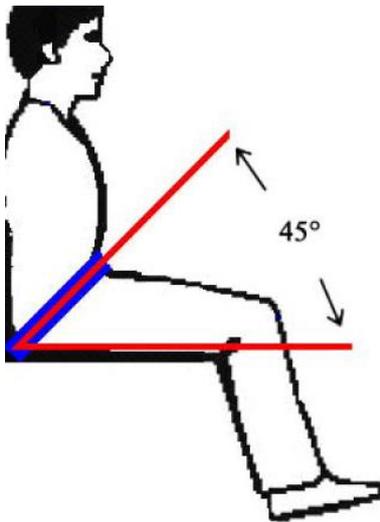
In all cases a risk assessment is required and careful monitoring of the patient to ensure their safety at all times. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory agency (MHRA) have warned of serious injury or death using a posture or Lapbelt/safety belt that isn't fitted or adjusted properly (MDA/2015/018 [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk))

Problems include the person in the seat slipping down and suffering position asphyxiation or strangulation, or falling out of the seat and being injured. The MHRA recommend:

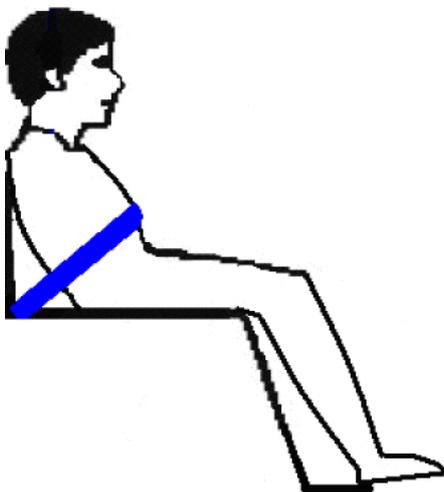
- Ensuring the lap belt is fitted, adjusted, cleaned, checked and maintained in accordance with manufacturer's instructions
- Before each use, ensure that if it is a posture/safety belt is in a satisfactory condition and is the right type for the user and is adjusted correctly.

**Correct posture and lap belt position**

The wheelchair user should be sitting in or near a 90 degree sitting position and the lap belt positioned as low as possible over the pelvis and not the waist, it should be tight enough to get one finger's width space between the user and belt. (see below diagram).



**Incorrect posture and lap belt position**



The lap belt is positioned above the pelvis against soft tissue area or lower abdomen, with the hips forward in the seat, giving a reclined posture. In this situation, the belt will not generally stop the person slipping further down in the wheelchair seat. There is the further risk of strangulation if the person continues to slip further down in the wheelchair as a result of an incorrectly applied belt.

**Incorrect position can be caused by:**

- The wheelchair user being unable to achieve a 90 degree sitting position
- The wheelchair user slipping down in the wheelchair due to inappropriate fitting and/or adjustment to the belt being held away from the wheelchair user by a part of the seating system or wheelchair, for example the belt being positioned over the top of the armrest.

For some patients a lapbelt cannot keep them in an appropriate sitting position and they may need other supports to stop them slipping down (e.g. tilt-in-space or supportive seating).

**Lap belt provision**

Wheelchair services do supply and fit posture retaining belts and lap belts if appropriate following an assessment of postural need. Nursing and therapy staff can order lapbelts for wheelchairs from the wheelchair service and they can also provide advice and guidance.