

Safe use of bed rails

Bed rails successfully prevent many falls, but their incorrect use has resulted in the deaths of bed occupants by asphyxiation through entrapment in gaps.

Risk assessment is KEY to ensure safe use. It should start with the bed occupant and include the combination of the proposed equipment, the bed and the mattress.

Issues to consider

1. If the bed occupant is likely to fall from their bed, are bed rails an appropriate solution?
2. Does the bed occupant's physical size and behaviour present a risk?
3. Is the bed rail suitable for the bed and mattress?
4. Has the bed rail been fitted correctly?
5. Can their head, neck, chest or body become trapped between:
 - the bed rail's bars?
 - other gaps created by the bed, rail, mattress and headboard combination?
6. Is the bed rail secure – does it seem likely that it will move away from the side of the bed in use, or fall off one end, creating a hazard?

If either the bed, mattress, bed rail or condition of the occupant changes then the risk assessment should be carried out again.

MHRA has produced the Device Bulletin DB 2006(06) *Safe use of bed rails*. Please report problems with assistive technology products online, via the MHRA website www.mhra.gov.uk or e-mail: aic@mhra.gsi.gov.uk

'Third party' bed rails, as photographed below, are not model specific and fit a wide range of beds. These are involved in most adverse incidents reported to us



Design safety

For use with adults:

Bed rails should be fitted so that the gap between their end and the headboard is less than 60mm or greater than 250mm.

All gaps between the rail bars must be 120mm or less.



Hazardous positions

Most of the deaths caused by bed rails could have been avoided if thorough risk assessments of the bed occupant and the bed rail had been carried out.

MHRA investigations have also shown that many serious and fatal incidents with bed rails have been caused by a *lack of maintenance*.

Bed rails must be *inspected* on a regular basis to ensure they are in good condition.



Things to avoid

- Gaps that could cause head, neck or chest entrapment between the end of the bed rail and the headboard or footboard.
- Using bed rails designed for divan beds on wooden or metal bedsteads.
- Using insecure fittings that let the bed rail move away from the side of the bed.
- Using bed rails that have not been maintained regularly.
- Bed rails with parts missing.

