

Reducing the risks when driving clients

Driving clients to and from appointments in the community can expose workers to violence and other undesirable behaviours. Clients have hit workers while they were driving, grabbed the steering wheel, or exited moving vehicles. Some of these incidents have resulted in injuries or crashes.

Consider alternatives to driving

As with any workplace hazard, driving clients should be avoided. Alternatives to driving clients include the following:

- Make clients responsible for their own transportation.
- Bring needed services to the client (for example, schedule a home visit).
- Use an alternative transportation service, such as a bus, taxi, or HandyDart, while a worker accompanies the client. When medically necessary, call for an ambulance.

When arranging alternative transportation, any information needed to protect the safety of other workers must be shared.

Assess the risk of driving a client

A violence risk assessment helps determine whether or not a trip should be taken, the steps needed to protect the worker, and the requirements for the vehicle. The assessment must cover the duration of the trip and should complement existing assessments and care plans (where applicable).



In the Regulation

Violence is defined in section 4.27 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation as “the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to cause injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.”

The first step in the risk assessment should examine the following:

- Any history of violence by the client
- The client's potential reactions to trip-related stressors (for example, negative perception of the destination, overstimulation, change of environment, and being in a smaller space such as a vehicle)

If the first step in the risk assessment determines that it might be safe to drive a client, then the second step is to examine client-centred factors such as the following:

- The client's status at the time of the trip, including his/her
 - Current mental and emotional state
 - Recent changes in behaviour and/or medication
 - Recent drug or alcohol use
 - Impulsivity
 - Level of pain
- The client's readiness to be a passenger, including his/her capacity to
 - Follow the driver's instructions
 - Refrain from distracting the driver
 - Wear a seat belt
 - Keep the vehicle doors closed
 - Refrain from smoking
- The client's needs during the trip (for example, food, toileting, medication, and tobacco)

If the results of the risk assessment suggest that a safe trip is unlikely, the trip is probably not worth the risk.

When to make other arrangements

Think about making other arrangements (i.e., alternatives to driving) for the client if any of the following apply:

- The client's health or safety is at risk or could rapidly deteriorate during the trip.
- The driver might need to carry out a task other than driving (for example, distracting the client or self protecting).
- A second worker or helper will be instructed on restraining the client while driving.

Use an appropriate vehicle

- Select a reliable, roadworthy vehicle that is the right size and configuration (for example, to allow transportation of mobility equipment).
- Have a barrier installed between the driver and the client when needed.
- Ideally, the driver should have control over door locks and windows.
- Stow away or remove objects that could be used as weapons (including loose items, hot drinks, etc.).

Plan for a successful trip

If the violence risk assessment determines that the trip can be completed safely, the next step is to plan for a successful trip.

Consider the following in your planning:

- Minimizing risk during the trip
 - Determine the ideal time for travel (for example, taking into account the client's needs, rush hour, and weather conditions).
 - Minimize the number of people and animals in the vehicle.
 - Select the safest route possible (not necessarily the most direct route). Limit the number of stops.
 - Follow safe driving practices to avoid agitating the client (for example, do not speed, change lanes excessively, or drive aggressively).
- Implementing other administrative procedures
 - Establish criteria for cancelling a planned trip.
 - Assign a second worker to the trip, but only if the additional worker's purpose is for minor calming or distracting of the client.

While this document relates to the risk of violence and other undesirable behaviours, there may be other hazards to worker health and safety while driving. These hazards could include overexertion (for example, while moving a physically dependent client) and exposure to infection. Provisions for working alone may also apply. Other risk assessments may be needed to address these situations.

When workers use their personal vehicles

Employers are responsible for the safety of their workers while driving clients, and must take steps to reduce those risks. Those responsibilities do not change when workers use their own vehicles to drive clients. A worker's personal vehicle may not meet the needs of the client, and there are insurance and liability issues that are beyond the scope of this document.

Plan for the unexpected

Provide guidance to workers about when to halt a trip and actions to take if something goes wrong (including when to call 911). A few examples of unexpected occurrences include the following:

- Involvement in a motor vehicle incident
- Mechanical breakdown of the vehicle
- Client behavioural issues that develop during the trip

Workers must report to their supervisor if there are any indications that the risk assessment or work practices need updating.

Resources

- **Health Care Enews**

Sign up for regular health and safety updates through the Health Care Enews. It covers regulation changes, new publications, upcoming events, and other relevant topics.

worksafebc.com/HealthCareEnews

- **Safety at Work centre — health care industry**

The Safety at Work centre for the health care sector provides information and resources on topics specific to employers and workers in health care and social services.

worksafebc.com/HealthCare

- **WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line**

WorkSafeBC officers are available to answer questions about workplace health and safety, worker and employer responsibilities, and reporting a workplace accident or incident. Anonymous calls are accepted.

Phone 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, or 1.888.621.7233 (621.SAFE) toll-free in Canada.

- **Plan Before You Drive Clients:
Reduce the Risk of Workplace Violence**

This three-minute video complements the bulletin. It is intended to generate discussion about some of the decisions you need to make before getting behind the wheel.

worksafebc.com/HealthCareVideos

