

Lesson one: Introduction

Who uses wheelchairs in emergencies?

A person might need a wheelchair if they are unable to walk or only able to walk short distances.

A person may propel themselves or be assisted to propel.

Wheelchairs in emergencies help people who are injured, older or with a disability to be mobile and access relief efforts, helping them survive in an emergency situation.

A person may:

- Use a **temporary wheelchair** while recovering from surgery or an illness.
- Use a **long term wheelchair** while managing an ongoing health problem. They may use their wheelchair for the whole day or combined with other mobility aids for short times each day.

Wheelchair features

Important features	Features to consider for emergencies	Other adjustable features	Optional features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strong and durable ✓ Smooth finish ✓ Available in different sizes ✓ Brakes ✓ Height adjustable footrests with calf or ankle strap ✓ Cushion ✓ Specified to carry the weight of the user. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick to assemble • Simple to adjust and fit • Suitable for rough ground: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thick tyres ○ Puncture proof inner tubes ○ Large castor wheels ○ Long distance between the centres of the rear wheel and castor wheel (wheelbase). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push handles • Rear wheel, push rim and castor wheel • Backrest and seat • Armrest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leg raisers reduce swelling or limit knee bend (after injury) • Stump boards reduce swelling or keep the knee in an extended (straight) position after below knee amputation.

Cushions:

- Every wheelchair should have a cushion.
- Two types of cushion should be provided in emergency situations:
 - A comfort cushion helps a person to sit in more comfort when using the wheelchair
 - A pressure relief cushion provides extra pressure relief and protection.

Pressure wounds:

- Anyone at risk of pressure wounds should have a pressure relief cushion
- If a person has an existing pressure wound, they should be referred to a health professional.

Leaks:

- If a person has difficulty with leaks (of urine or stool), they should be referred for continence assessment. A second pressure relief cushion may help.

Backrests:

- Consider **high backrest** if person:
 - Is very tall
 - Is likely to get tired quickly

- Prefers extra support.
- Consider **low backrest** if person:
 - Is very short
 - Is fit and active
 - Can sit well without extra support.

Rear wheel position:

- Consider safe rear wheel position if person:
 - Has double amputation
 - Worries about tipping backwards
 - Is tall
 - Experiences uncontrolled movements which cause loss of balance.
- Consider active rear wheel position if person:
 - Is fit and active
 - Already able to do a wheelie (back wheel balance)
 - Is short.

Transfers:

- Footrests, armrests and brakes can be an obstacle during transfers. Moving them out of the way may make transfers easier
- Brakes are important for keeping the wheelchair still and safe while transferring.

Supportive seating:

It is not possible for everyone to sit safely and in comfort in a wheelchair.

- Some people will need extra support or dedicated supportive seat
- Extra support or supportive seating should be provided by health workers who have advanced training. Health workers with these skills may not be available in emergencies
- People who need supportive seating should receive a plan for priority follow up.

Lesson two: Select

Wheelchairs in emergencies service set up

The first step in providing a wheelchair in an emergency is to assess the person's needs to select the best product with them.

If possible, wheelchairs in emergencies should be provided within existing emergency medical, surgical or rehabilitation services and close to other health services.

To increase the speed of selecting the right type and size of wheelchair for a person's needs:

- Store wheelchairs near where they are provided
- Store wheelchairs and cushions by type and size
- Keep assembled wheelchairs in each size.

Assess

Information from the assessment will help you to select a wheelchair and plan for:

- Teaching
- Referral
- Follow up.

People move around a lot in emergencies, ask for a second contact phone number. Find out how any health problems may affect the person's mobility and ability to sit.

Select a temporary use or long term wheelchair to match the person's short or long term mobility needs. Select the right size of wheelchair by checking the width and fit. If the wheelchair does not fit the person correctly, select a different size.

Plan

After selecting and adjusting the wheelchair to fit, record the wheelchair size and set up including:

- Seat width
- Seat depth
- Rear wheel position
- Backrest position.
- Wheelchair options including:
 - Type and number of cushions
 - Type of leg support.

Make a plan for any referrals for wound care, continence assessment and follow up.

People using a wheelchair may have barriers to their mobility. Consider whether advice or other assistive products can help.

Type	Barriers	Assistive products which may help
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steps• Narrow doorways• Rough ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Portable ramps• A well fitting wheelchair (without extra width)• A wheelchair suitable for rough ground.
Transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bed• Toilet / Shower / Bath• Vehicle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adjusting bed to same height as wheelchair• Transfer board and/or toilet/shower chair and/or grab rail• Transfer board if transferring from wheelchair to vehicle seat• Portable ramp if staying seated in wheelchair inside vehicle.

If person already has a wheelchair:

- Check it is meeting their needs
- Check the fit and condition of the wheelchair
- Replace the wheelchair if it is not suitable or cannot be repaired.

Lesson three: Fit

The second step in providing a wheelchair in an emergency is to fit the wheelchair to the person. Correct fit is important to ensure the person can propel more easily and reduce the risk of injury from a poorly fitting wheelchair.

Prepare the wheelchair

Always check the wheelchair is safe to use and all parts are working before fitting it to the person.

Check:

- The correct type of cushion is on the wheelchair and the cushion size matches the seat size
- If a person needs leg support, it is attached to the correct side of the wheelchair.

Do not provide a wheelchair if the person's weight is greater than the weight rating of the wheelchair.

Use the *Wheelchair safe and ready checklist* to prepare the wheelchair for the person.






Fit check

Correct fit is important for the person's comfort and to make the wheelchair easier to use.

Check while the person is sitting and again while the person propels or is assisted to propel:

- Wheelchair size and adjustments
- Person's posture.

Use the *Wheelchair fitting checklist* to fit the wheelchair to the person.

Seat width	Seat depth	Footrest height	Sitting upright	
				
Hands slide smoothly between person and wheelchair.	Two fingers between chair and back of knees. Check no pressure on calf.	Foot rests flat on footplate. Thigh rests flat on cushion.	Check from side.	Check from front.

Consider backrest adjustment and rear wheel adjustment, if available.

Lesson four: Use

The third step in providing a wheelchair in an emergency is to teach the person how to use and take care of the product. Using a wheelchair in the correct way is safer and less tiring.

Use the *Wheelchairs in emergencies user information leaflet* to teach a person, family members and/or caregivers, how to take care of their health and look after their wheelchair and cushion. Give the person a printed copy of the leaflet.

If a person has used a wheelchair before, discuss their abilities and knowledge and select any training together.

If a person needs a pressure relief cushion, teach them how to avoid pressure wounds and relieve pressure.

Lesson five: Follow up

The fourth step in providing a wheelchair in an emergency is to make sure that the product still meets the person's needs and is in good working order.

A follow up plan should be made for all people using a wheelchair long term.

Follow up may be done more often if the person has needs that are changing quickly, such as children.

People who need a priority follow up plan are those who:

- Are at risk of pressure wounds
- Require extra support to sit upright and in comfort
- People and caregivers who had difficulty with any of the instructions.

During follow up, check the wheelchair and cushion is still:

- Suitable for the person's needs
- In good condition.

In some places there may not have been a wheelchair service before the emergency. Start planning for follow up services as soon as possible.