

Estates & Facilities Alert



Ref. DH (2008) 05
Gateway Ref. 9818

IMMEDIATE ACTION

For:

ACTION ✓

UPDATE

INFORMATION

Issued: 24/04/2008

Action underway by: 9th May 2008

Action completed by: 20th June 2008

	Section
Equipment: Patient weigh scales	
Problem: Potential for medication errors due to incorrectly calibrated weigh scales giving inaccurate readings or inappropriate scales being used.	▶ ①
Action: Ensure all scales used for weighing patients in relation to medication, treatment or diagnosis are of the Class III type, and are regularly maintained and correctly calibrated. In order to satisfy the "action completed by" date above, it will be necessary to have identified all scales used for medication, treatment and monitoring which are not of the Class III type, and to have removed them from use.	▶ ②
Action by: Chief Executive/Board Member with special responsibility for health and safety, in accordance with local procedures, should ensure that this alert is brought to the attention of appropriate staff which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risk Managers• Health & Safety Officers/Advisors• Estates Managers• Nurse Directors• Clinical Directors• Ward Managers• Community Care Staff Independent Health and Social Care Providers – Private Clinics, Residential and Nursing Homes	
CONTACTS: Technical enquires should quote reference number DH 2008/05 and be addressed to: UK Weighing Federation Brooke House 4 The Lakes Bedford Road Northampton NN4 7YD Tel: 01604 622023 www.ukwf.org.uk	<i>Non-technical enquiries about the alert:</i> Defects & Failures Department of Health Estates & Facilities Division 3N12 Quarry House, Quarry Hill Leeds LS2 7UE Tel: 0113 254 6881 Fax: 0113 254 5185 Email: paul.roberts@dh.gsi.gov.uk

This Alert is on our web site: <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

1. PROBLEM: **Potential for medication errors due to incorrectly calibrated weigh scales giving inaccurate readings**

1. The Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) has recently audited a number of NHS organisations and identified areas where scales used for weighing patients were incorrectly calibrated or of the wrong type. This has the potential to lead to medication errors where medication dosage may be calculated on the weight of the patient.
2. There are two classes of weighing equipment in use in healthcare premises:
 - Class III should be used in healthcare premises for medication, treatment, and monitoring.
 - Class IV (less accurate domestic type scales) may be in use, but should only be used for monitoring/recording patients weights in their notes in GP consulting rooms, community settings (peripatetic visits) and nursing homes.

2. ACTION:

3. All weigh scales should be checked to confirm they meet with the class relevant to their clinical location.
4. Any Class IV scales being used for medication, treatment or monitoring should be withdrawn for use and replaced with the Class III type.
5. There should be a system in place for checking the accuracy of weighing equipment.
6. NHS organisations should ensure that all scales used for the weighing of patients are regularly checked and routinely maintained to ensure correct calibration in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.
7. Any of the weighing equipment that may not be giving accurate readings should be removed from use until re-calibrated. They should be re-checked after a short period of use following re-calibration to ensure there are no un-detected problems leading to inaccurate readings.
8. Class IV scales should be clearly labelled to indicate they are not suitable for use in calculating medication dosage.

3. Other information

9. There is the further potential for error where scales can display both imperial and metric units. Where this is the case, all readings should be set to **METRIC**.
10. Weigh scales for medical use for the medication, treatment or monitoring of patients should, in addition to bearing a CE mark, also be provided with a green 'M' sticker. This is a supplementary marking signifying conformity with essential requirements under the Non-Automatic Weighing Instruments (NAWI) Directive. This sticker has the same status as the CE mark and should not be removed from the instrument. Class IV scales should not be found displaying this green 'M' sticker.
11. More information can be found in Quarterly Briefing (Volume 16 Number 2) published in Autumn 2007.
12. See also the Medical Scales page on the UK Weighing Federation website www.ukwf.org.uk

HOW TO REPORT DEFECTS & FAILURES

Defects and failures relating to non-medical equipment, plant and buildings should be reported to the Department as soon as possible. Advice on how to report can be found in DH (2008) 01. Defect and failure reporting forms and an on-line reporting facility are available on the NHS Information Centre website at www.efm.ic.nhs.uk