

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Logistics for the Handling of Bariatric Patients

The National Institutes of Health defines morbidly obese patients as those with a body mass index (BMI) assessment of 40. Patients whose index reaches 50 and over are referred to as super-obese or bariatric¹. There are several aspects of handling morbidly obese and bariatric patients that are of serious concern to EMS personnel. Without planning for the needed resources, patient lifting and handling as well as transport of these patients, emergency responders may put the patients, themselves and others at risk of injury.

To assist your EMS organization prepare for handling bariatric patients, VFIS recommends that you consider the following best practices to reduce the risk of both patient and provider injury:

Administrative Controls

- Provide written guidelines for handling bariatric patients. These may include:
 - Assessing a patient for weight and/or BMI.
 - Providing BMI field reference materials.
 - Understanding patient-handling equipment limitations.
 - Knowing who and when to contact for assistance.
 - Providing for patient dignity.
- Develop guidelines for assessing risks not directly related to patient health.
 - Establish guidelines for scene assessment:
 - weight and size limitations of stairs, steps, ramps, porches & decks
 - walking surface concerns (grade, grounds, driveways and walks & interior floor finishes)
 - adequacy of door opening(s)
 - location of the patient
 - weight or BMI of the patient
 - ability to get the patient handling/lifting equipment near the patient
 - Identify and clearly communicate the maximum weight that both the patient-lifting equipment and ambulances can accommodate.
 - Establish an internal reporting system that can alert you to where bariatric patients are located, so that proper resources can be deployed when a call for service is received.
 - Develop a tracking system for bariatric call volume to determine immediate and long-term equipment needs. Those EMS services who have frequent bariatric calls may want to consider equipping a bariatric unit or purchasing specialized equipment.
 - Identify outside agencies and resources that may be able to assist you with access, transport, lifting, and counseling. Establish a relationship with these agencies and work out how they can assist your organization and the patient, particularly to the needs of super-obese patients.

Field Staff

- Equipment familiarization
 - Train frequently with patient-handling equipment to remain familiar with the:
 - availability of specialty patient-handling equipment
 - the weight limitations of patient handling equipment
 - the usage of specialty patient handling equipment

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control Representative at (800) 233-1957.

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Field Staff Continued

- Be prepared at the scene to:
 - Assess for hazards that may inhibit moving the patient safely (plush carpet, soft ground, inclined surfaces, narrow hallways etc.).
 - Select and utilize the proper lifting device.
 - Know the weight you're about to lift (ask the patient's weight if you can and add to that the weight of the equipment).
 - Know your physical abilities and limitations and also those of your partner.
 - Attempt to coordinate your physical abilities with your partner's and apply it to the situation accordingly.
 - Use proper lifting techniques and keep the weight you're lifting close to your body.
 - Communicate clearly and frequently with your partner(s). Verbalize all commands.

Body Mass Index Table

Height (inches)	Obese										Extremely Obese																
	BMI	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	
58	143	148	153	158	162	167	172	177	181	186	191	196	201	205	210	215	220	224	229	234	239	244	248	253	258		
59	148	153	158	163	168	173	178	183	188	193	198	203	208	212	217	222	227	232	237	242	247	252	257	262	267		
60	153	158	163	168	174	179	184	189	194	199	204	209	215	220	225	230	235	240	245	250	255	261	266	271	276		
61	158	164	169	174	180	185	190	195	201	206	211	217	222	227	232	238	243	248	254	259	264	269	275	280	285		
62	164	169	175	180	186	191	196	202	207	213	218	224	229	235	240	246	251	256	262	267	273	278	284	289	295		
63	169	175	180	186	191	197	203	208	214	220	225	231	237	242	248	254	259	265	270	278	282	287	293	299	304		
64	174	180	186	192	197	204	209	215	221	227	232	238	244	250	256	262	267	273	279	285	291	296	302	308	314		
65	180	186	192	198	204	210	216	222	228	234	240	246	252	258	264	270	276	282	288	294	300	306	312	318	324		
66	186	192	198	204	210	216	223	229	235	241	247	253	260	266	272	278	284	291	297	303	309	315	322	328	334		
67	191	198	204	211	217	223	230	236	242	249	255	261	268	274	280	287	293	299	306	312	319	325	331	338	344		
68	197	203	210	216	223	230	236	243	249	256	262	269	276	282	289	295	302	308	315	322	328	335	341	348	354		
69	203	209	216	223	230	236	243	250	257	263	270	277	284	291	297	304	311	318	324	331	338	345	351	358	365		
70	209	216	222	229	236	243	250	257	264	271	278	285	292	299	306	313	320	327	334	341	348	355	362	369	376		
71	215	222	229	236	243	250	257	265	272	279	286	293	301	308	315	322	329	338	343	351	358	365	372	379	386		
72	221	228	235	242	250	258	265	272	279	287	294	302	309	316	324	331	338	346	353	361	368	375	383	390	397		
73	227	235	242	250	257	265	272	280	288	295	302	310	318	325	333	340	348	355	363	371	378	386	393	401	408		
74	233	241	249	256	264	272	280	287	295	303	311	319	326	334	342	350	358	365	373	381	389	396	404	412	420		
75	240	248	256	264	272	279	287	295	303	311	319	327	335	343	351	359	367	376	383	391	399	407	415	423	431		
76	246	254	263	271	279	287	295	304	312	320	328	336	344	353	361	369	377	385	394	402	410	418	426	435	443		

¹ National Institutes of Health; table also courtesy of NIH

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