



Safeguarding Alert!

Important information about Van Safety:

General Guidelines for Safe Van Operation:

- Individuals should not be left unattended in a van.
- Vehicle keys must ALWAYS be in the possession of staff and NO vehicle should be left with the engine running unless there is a licensed driver in the driver's seat. (An exception is noted in situations that require the driver of the vehicle to operate the wheelchair lift. At a minimum the parking brake should be engaged and the transmission set in park.)
- It is the responsibility of the van driver to:
 - Have a valid NYS driver's license,
 - Obey all traffic laws,
 - Use seatbelts for all passengers and driver (including wheelchair securement straps and tie downs),
 - See that the vehicle is in good operating condition,
 - Be familiar with safety procedures,
 - Be free from medications, drugs or alcohol that might cause drowsiness or impede driving,
 - Never exceed the passenger capacity for the vehicle, and
 - Perform a pre-trip vehicle inspection prior to each trip.
 - Drivers need to know the individuals (seizure disorder, behavioral issues, osteoporosis, sensitivity to heat and cold) and their individual needs and take appropriate precautions.
 - Drivers need to drive in a conservative, defensive and courteous manner.
- Vans are heavier than passenger cars and require a greater stopping distance. Try to avoid situations where emergency maneuvers may be required.
- Vans are higher than passenger cars and are more difficult to handle in the wind (especially on wet or icy roads and bridges). They are more difficult to turn due to a higher center of gravity and may not fit under overhangs. Therefore the driver must
 - Grip the wheel firmly for control,
 - Drive more slowly,
 - Know the height of the vehicle, and
 - Watch out for overhangs (drive-in windows, wires, roof overhangs, and low-ceilinged parking garages).
- Vans are longer and wider than passenger cars and, therefore, have a greater turning radius and are less maneuverable. Drivers must allow for more room when turning corners and parking.
- Vans have poorer rear visibility than passenger cars so drivers must use caution (along with the side and rear view mirrors) when backing up. Mirrors must be properly adjusted for each driver. Whenever possible,



an additional staff member should leave the van, proceed to the back of the van, and assist the driver in backing up.

- If the driver is the only staff person available, it is advisable for him/her to get out of the van to check behind the van before backing up. (The driver should be sure to set the parking brake, put the van in park, and take the keys.)
- Staff should make the ride as comfortable as possible for individuals.
 - Wheelchairs ride with a higher center of gravity. Therefore, bumps and curves are intensified for individuals. Generally, the ride is smoother toward the front of the van.
 - Accelerate and brake slowly. Take it easy around corners.
 - Drive defensively (anticipate stops, avoid bumps and potholes).
- To reduce rollover risk, (taking into consideration behavioral and personal space issues), vans should be loaded so that any empty spaces/seats are in the back.
- Adequate ventilation and appropriate air temperature must be provided for passengers.
- Van doors must be locked when the vehicle is in motion.
- Adequate staff supervision must be provided. When two (or more) staff are transporting individuals, staff should be placed so as to properly supervise individuals. Both staff should not be seated in the front of the van.
- Vans should have regular preventive maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer.
 - This should include proper tire maintenance, inflation and inspection.
 - A Vehicle Safety Inspection checklist should be completed at least monthly.
- Vehicles should be equipped with:
 - First aid kit (including CPR mask);
 - Body fluid absorption/protective barrier kit;
 - Seat belt cutter;
 - Road safety kit (including triangular reflectors);
 - Emergency telephone numbers; and
 - A cell phone (must not be used by the driver when the vehicle is in motion).

Staff Training:

- Staff should be trained in the agency's policies and procedures regarding transporting individuals and the use of wheelchair lifts.
- Staff should be trained on the individualized needs of each individual that they will be transporting.
- Staff should be trained in proper procedures in case of vehicle breakdown.
- Staff should be trained in evacuating the van safely and efficiently.

Use of the Van Lift for Individuals who are Ambulatory:



- Individuals who are ambulatory should not use the lift if another safe means of entering and exiting the van is available to them. When indicated, physical therapists, or other appropriate clinical staff, should evaluate an individual to determine the safest way for him/her to enter/exit a van.
- It is generally the safest alternative for an ambulatory individual who must ride on a lift to do so in a wheelchair, even if he/she doesn't ordinarily need a wheelchair for mobility. A transport wheelchair should be used for loading and unloading in these situations.
- Individuals who are ambulatory and ride on the lift in the standing position should:
 - Be evaluated for the safest technique for entering and exiting the van. The individual's program plan should include information on the recommended technique for entering and exiting the van specific to the individual's needs. There should be a written procedure for the staff to follow.
 - Be assisted by two staff whenever possible. One staff should stand on the ground and one should stand in the van. The individual should face the van when ascending and face away from the van when descending. One staff should assist the individual as he/she enters and exits the van to prevent him/her from bumping his/her head. When the individual is on the lift, staff should be supporting the individual. The individual should hold the railing with at least one hand, even if he/she uses an assistive device such as a walker.
 - Step-well entryways are generally the safest way for individuals who are ambulatory and capable of negotiating steps to enter and exit a van. Step-well entryways can be retrofitted to most vans.

Transporting Individuals Who Use Wheelchairs:

- Wheelchair seatbelts and brakes should be checked prior to transporting the individual in a van. Wheelchairs with custom seating systems should be checked to determine that the seating system is well secured to the frame.
- No individual should be transported in a vehicle unless all wheelchair seatbelts and brakes are functioning properly and used.
- Staff operating lifts must use safe operating procedures.
- Vehicle should be parked on a level surface that is free from obstructions, away from traffic, with the vehicle in park and the emergency brake engaged.
- Individuals should be discharged on sidewalks or in a parking lot. If it is necessary to discharge to the street, have staff immediately available to provide assistance and supervision.
- Both wheelchair brakes should be locked whenever the wheelchair is on the lift.
- The roll stop mechanism must be in the upright position before the lift is operated.
- Staff should check the individual's head, arms and leg clearance as he/she enters and exits the van.
- The entire wheelchair must fit on the lift.
- The safest procedure for loading/unloading using a lift involves two or more staff.
- Staff should know how to operate the lift manually.



- As individuals board the van, staff should ensure that each wheelchair is secured before the next person boards. When exiting, wheelchairs should have the tie-downs removed one at-a-time, just prior to exiting.
- It is generally not a safe practice for staff to ride on the lift with an individual. If it is necessary for staff to ride on the lift with an individual who is in a wheelchair, the staff must be able to stand between the van and the outward-facing wheelchair. Be aware that staff should not overload the lift (maximum of one staff and one passenger on the lift at a time).
- Many accidents occur when tie-downs are not properly used or when the brakes are not engaged. When securing the wheelchair on the van, the brakes should be locked, the seat belt should be rechecked and the wheelchair should be properly secured with floor straps, bars or other approved mechanisms. (Electric wheelchairs should have drive belts engaged and be switched to "off" position.)
 - Tie-downs are always safer than bar systems.
 - Wheelchair tie-down attachment points should be near the wheelchair's center of gravity, at welds and stress points, and NOT on removable parts such as footrests.
 - Staff should be trained to identify tie-down attachment sites on each wheelchair that they will be securing.
 - It is helpful to mark these tie-down sites so there is no confusion.

ALL FOUR TIE-DOWN POINTS MUST BE USED, EVEN FOR SHORT DISTANCES.



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