



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

DATE OF  
ISSUE

EFFECTIVE  
DATE

NUMBER

6 months  
after final  
publication

SUBJECT

Prone Restraints in Children's Facilities

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**SCOPE:**

This bulletin applies to Child Residential and Day Treatment Facilities, State Youth Development Centers and Youth Forestry Camps.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this bulletin is to clarify that prone position manual restraints ("prone restraints") are prohibited in child residential and day treatment facilities that are licensed under 55 Pa.Code Chapter 3800 (relating to child residential and day treatment facilities).

## **BACKGROUND:**

The use of a restraint as an intervention is a growing concern within Pennsylvania, nationally and internationally. The Department of Public Welfare shares this concern.

Restraints bring the risk of serious injury or death of the child or staff; emotional harm and trauma to the child or staff; and the disruption of the relationships between the child, family members, peers and staff. Prone restraints are particularly dangerous because they can impede or even prevent breathing by placing pressure or weight on the child's respiratory system. According to the Coalition Against Institutionalized Child Abuse, at least 73 children in the United States have died as a result of being restrained in the last 18 years; most resulted from the child being restrained in the prone position. All program offices will work together to eliminate the use of prone restraints in all facilities that serve children.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Prone restraints are those in which a child is held face down on the floor. This places a child at risk of decreased functional lung volume by putting pressure on the child's chest wall and putting the child in a position that makes it difficult to monitor respiratory status. In normal breathing, chest muscles and the diaphragm, key respiratory muscles, work in concert. During a prone restraint, the chest has difficulty expanding, and the diaphragm has difficulty descending into the abdomen. This can result in asphyxia, which is the body's diminished ability to intake oxygen and to eliminate carbon dioxide, and it can lead to impairment of vital organs, especially the brain, and result in death.

Because prone restraints apply pressure or weight on a child's respiratory system, they are prohibited by 55 Pa.Code § 3800.211(b) (relating to manual restraints).

**REGULATION INTERPRETATION:**

The regulation interpretation is contained in Annex A to this Bulletin.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:**

This statement of policy is effective immediately upon publication in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

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**ANNEX A**  
**TITLE 55. PUBLIC WELFARE**  
**PART V. CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES MANUAL**  
**SUBPART E. RESIDENTIAL AGENCIES, FACILITIES, AND SERVICES**  
**CHAPTER 3800. CHILD RESIDENTIAL AND DAY TREATMENT FACILITIES**

§ 3800.211a. Prone position manual restraint—statement of policy.

(a) Prone position manual restraint is restraint during which a child is held face down on the floor.

(b) Prone position manual restraint is prohibited by § 3800.211(b) (relating to manual restraints) because it applies weight or pressure on the child's respiratory system.

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