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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH/ DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SUPPORTS DIVISION

# HEALTH ALERT

## Choking Hazard from Bulk Forming Laxatives

### What should Providers do?

All New Mexico DD providers are advised to assess their internal medication administration practices to assure that :

- orders or instructions regarding administration of bulk forming laxatives are clearly written
- bulk forming laxatives are being administered with at least 8 ounces of water or juice.
- bulk forming laxatives are NOT being mixed with foods.
- staff are aware that airway obstruction could occur if the manufacturers instructions are not followed and 911 should be called if there is any sign of choking when giving bulk laxatives

Some persons with Developmental Disabilities experience health changes that impact the type of medications they need. Be sure to contact the individuals PCP as needed to discuss medications. Do not start or stop any medicine without the PCP's approval.

Psyllium and polycarbophil are bulk forming laxatives. **This type of laxative can cause choking and obstruction of the airway if they are not mixed according to the manufacturers instructions.** These products can quickly harden and may create a solid mass that can block the person's airway- creating a medical emergency that could result in death. These are known by trade names such as Metamucil, Perdiem, Genfiber, Fibercon, Equilactin and others.

**These laxatives must be mixed or taken with at least 8 ounces of water or juice. Powdered bulk forming laxatives should NEVER be mixed with food.**

Bulk forming fiber laxatives work by absorbing liquid in the intestines and swelling to create a softer, bulky stool that is easier to pass.

Bulk forming laxatives come in powders, capsules or wafers. Care must be taken to administer these medications properly.

Bulk laxative powder: Powder laxatives must be mixed with at least 8 ounces of water or juice. If the mixture is too thick, add more liquid. After drinking the entire mixture, add a little more liquid to the same glass, swirl gently and drink right away to make sure you get the entire dose.

Bulk laxative capsules and wafers: If capsules are not taken with enough water, they may become stuck in the throat, swell and obstruct the airway. Wafers must be thoroughly chewed and taken with adequate water.

Psyllium and polycarbophil are not recommended for individuals who have throat problems or difficulty in swallowing. Obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract has been noted, particularly in individuals with previous bowel surgeries or anatomic abnormalities or when mixed with inadequate amounts of water or juice. Please discuss the use of these types of laxatives with the Primary Care Physician to determine if a different laxative may be more appropriate.