

## Hot or Cold Packs Application

**Document Number** GL2005\_015

**Publication date** 25-Jan-2005

**Functional Sub group** Clinical/ Patient Services - Medical Treatment

**Summary** Draws to attention the potential of injury occurring to patients when hot or cold packs are applied to the skin.

**Author Branch** Quality and Safety

**Branch contact** 9391 9998

**Applies to** Area Health Services/Chief Executive Governed Statutory Health Corporation, Board Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Affiliated Health Organisations, Community Health Centres, Divisions of General Practice, NSW Dept of Health, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes, Public Health Units, Public Hospitals

**Distributed to** Public Health System, Community Health Centres, Divisions of General Practice, NSW Department of Health, Public Health Units, Public Hospitals, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes, Tertiary Education Institutes

**Review date** 25-Jan-2010

**File No.**

**Previous reference** 97/129

**Issue date** 28-Nov-1997

**Status** Active

## CIRCULAR

<b>File No</b>	
<b>Circular No</b>	97/129
<b>Issued</b>	28 November 1997
<b>Contact</b>	J Liddle (02) 9391 9183

### APPLICATION OF HOT OR COLD PACKS

This circular should be read in conjunction with the Patient Matters Manual Section 15.6 (use of hot water bottles).

The purpose of this circular is to draw to the attention of nursing, allied health and medical staff, the potential of injury occurring to patients, when hot or cold packs are applied to the skin.

This circular can be used as a resource for local health services to develop and implement local guidelines and policies and in conducting educational sessions on the safe use of hot or cold packs.

The greatest care must be exercised at all times to ensure that patients are not harmed as a result of the inappropriate use of hot or cold packs. Staff may wish to discuss with the medical officer, Director of Nursing, Nursing Unit Manager or the leader of the clinical team, whether hot or cold packs are an appropriate treatment, prior to use.

Clinical practice requires the assessment of the sensory status and condition of the patient's skin prior to any hot or cold pack being applied. The sensory status of the treated area and the condition of the patient's skin should be regularly monitored while the hot or cold pack is in use. Continuous application of hot or cold packs should not exceed 20 minutes and may need to be less, depending on individual circumstances. At the first indication of any adverse signs, treatment should be stopped.

At the commencement of treatment, the site and time should be recorded in the patient's health care history. On completion of treatment and after the treated area has been examined, the duration of application and condition of the treated area should also be recorded.

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Distributed in accordance with circular list(s):

A 108    B            C 112    D            E  
F 41      G            H            I            J 103  
K            L 30        M 10        N            P 17        Q

73 Miller St North Sydney NSW 2060  
Locked Mail Bag 961 North Sydney NSW 2059  
Telephone (02) 9391 9000 Facsimile (02) 9391 9101

Particular care should be taken with the following patients who are at higher risk of injury:

- infants
- patients who are unconscious, including patients undergoing general anaesthesia
- patients who have impaired sensation, including patients with neurological conditions or those undergoing spinal or epidural anaesthesia or local nerve blocks
- patients where sensory status is unable to be assessed
- older patients
- patients who have language or communication difficulties.

Commercially available heating or cooling devices should comply with the relevant Australian Standard where this exists and be used in compliance with the manufacturer's instructions and locally developed policies. The subject list of Australian Standards for the Health Care Industry (SL01) is available from:

Standards Australia  
PO Box 1055, Strathfield NSW 2135  
Telephone: 02 9746 4700 Facsimile: 02 9746 3333.

Michael Reid  
**Director-General**