

WHY DO WE USE COLOR-CODED WRISTBANDS?

Color-coded wristbands are used in care settings to quickly communicate a certain healthcare state, condition or an “alert” that a patient/resident/client may have. This is done so every staff member can provide the best care possible.



SAMPLE POLICY AND PROCEDURE LANGUAGE

PURPOSE

To have a standardized process that identifies and communicates patient/resident/client specific risk factors or special needs by standardizing the use of color-coded wristbands based upon the patient’s/resident’s/client’s assessment, wishes and medical status.

OBJECTIVES

- A. To reduce the risk of potential for confusion associated with the use of color-coded wristbands;
- B. To communicate patient/resident/client safety risks to all health care providers;
- C. To include the patient/resident/client, family members and significant others in the communication process;
- D. To promote safe healthcare; and
- E. To adopt the following risk-reduction strategies:
 - a. A preprinted written descriptive text is used on the bands clarifying the intent (i.e., “Allergy,” “Fall Risk,” “Latex Allergy,” “DNR” or “Restricted Limb”);
 - b. Restrict the use of handwriting on the color-coded wristband, except in emergent situations;
 - c. Application or removal of color-coded wristbands will occur only by a nurse or licensed staff person conducting an assessment;
 - d. Labels, stickers or other visual cues will be used in the medical record to communicate risk factors or color-coded wristband application, using the same corresponding color and text associated with the colored band;
 - e. “Social cause” wristbands, such as the “Live Strong” and other causes, should not be worn by patients/residents in the healthcare setting. Staff should have family members take the social cause wristbands home or remove them from the patient/resident/client and store them with their other personal items. This is to avert confusion with the color-coded wristbands and to enhance patient/resident/client safety practices; and
 - f. To assist the patient/resident/client and their family members in becoming a partner in the care provided and safety measures being used, patient/resident/client and family education should be conducted regarding:
 - i. The meanings of the color-coded wristbands and the alert associated with each wristband; and
 - ii. The risks associated with wearing “social cause” wristbands and why patients/residents are asked to remove them.

DEFINITIONS

The following represents the meaning of each color-coded wristband:

REDALLERGY

YELLOWFALL RISK

GREENLATEX ALLERGY

PURPLEDO NOT RESUSCITATE (DNR)

PINKLIMB ALERT

Identification (ID) Bands in Admission, Pre-Registration, Emergency or Outpatient Departments:

Colorless (clear) admission patient/resident identification wristbands are applied in accordance with procedures outlined in organizational policy on patient/resident identification and registration.

COLOR-CODED WRISTBANDS

During the initial patient/resident/client assessment, data is collected to evaluate the needs of the patient/resident/client, and a plan of care unique to the individual is initiated. Throughout the course of care, ongoing reassessment may uncover additional pertinent medical information, trigger key decision points or reveal additional risk factors about the patient/resident/client. It is during the initial and reassessment procedures that risk factors are identified or modified. Because this is an interdisciplinary process, it is important to identify who has responsibility for applying and removing color-coded bands, how this information is documented and how it is communicated. The following procedures have been established to remove uncertainty in these processes:

- A. Any patient/resident/client demonstrating risk factors on initial assessment will have a color-coded wristband placed on the same extremity as the admission identification band by the nurse or licensed professional if the nurse is unavailable.
- B. The application of the color-coded wristband is documented in the chart by the nurse [per provider policy].
- C. If labels, stickers or other visual cues are used to document in the record, the stickers should correspond with wristband color and text.
- D. Upon application of the color-coded wristband, the nurse will instruct the patient/resident/client and family members, if present, that the wristband is not to be removed.
- E. In the event that any color-coded wristband(s) have to be removed for a treatment or procedure, a nurse will remove the bands. Upon completion of the treatment or procedure, new bands will be made, risks reconfirmed and the bands placed immediately by the nurse.

SOCIAL CAUSE WRISTBANDS

Following the identification process, a licensed clinician, such as the admitting nurse, examines the patient/resident/client for “social cause” wristbands.

If social cause wristbands are present, the nurse will explain the risks associated with the wristbands and ask the individual to remove them. If the patient/resident/client agrees, the band will be removed and given to a

family member to take home or stored with the other personal belongings. If the patient/resident/client refuses, the nurse will request that a refusal form acknowledging the risks associated with the “social cause” wristband (see attached document) be signed. In the event that the patient/resident/client is unable to provide permission and family members or a significant other is also not present, the licensed staff member may remove the band or cover the band with tape or gauze to reduce the potential of confusion or harm.



PATIENT/RESIDENT/CLIENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND EDUCATION

It is important that the patient/resident/client and family members are informed about the care being provided and the significance of that care and that they are acknowledged as valuable members of the healthcare team. Including them in the process of color-coded wristbands will assure a common understanding of what the bands mean, how care is provided when the bands are worn and their role in correcting any information that contributes to this process. Therefore, during assessment procedures, the nurse should take the opportunity to educate and re-educate the patient/resident/client and family members about:

- A. The meanings of the color-coded wristbands and the alert associated with each;
- B. The risks associated with wearing “social cause” wristbands and why they are asked to remove them;
- C. The importance of notifying the nurse whenever a wristband has been removed and not reapplied; or
- D. The importance of notifying the family when and for what reason a new band is applied.

Patients/residents/clients and families have an educational brochure available to them that explains this information as well.

HAND-OFF COMMUNICATION

The nurse will reconfirm with patient/family/client, other caregivers and the patients chart at transfer and during changes in level of care that color-coded wristbands are appropriate. Errors are corrected immediately and documented.

Color-coded wristbands are not removed at discharge. For home discharges, the patient/resident/client is advised to remove the band at home. For discharges to another facility, the bands are left intact as a safety alert during transfer. Receiving facilities should follow their policy and procedure for the banding process.



DO NOT RESUSCITATE (DNR)

DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) status and all other risk assessments are determined by individual provider policy, procedure and/or physician order written within and acknowledged within the care setting only. The color-coded wristband serves as an alert and does not take the place of an order. DNR orders must be written and verification of Advanced Directives must occur.

STAFF EDUCATION

Staff education regarding color-coded wristbands should occur during the new orientation process and reinforced as appropriate. [Providers should insert specific language so it matches annual processes and competencies, should you decide to include color-coded wristbands in that process.]

PATIENT/RESIDENT/CLIENT REFUSAL

If the patient/resident/client refuses to wear the color-coded band, or refuses to remove a “social cause” wristband, an explanation of the risks will be provided. The nurse will reinforce that it is their opportunity to participate in efforts to prevent errors, and it is their responsibility as part of the healthcare team. The nurse will document refusals in the medical record and the explanation provided by the patient/resident/client or their family member. The patient/resident/client will be requested to sign an acknowledgement of refusal.

(Insert Identification Information Per Provider Policy)

PATIENT/RESIDENT/CLIENT REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN WRISTBAND PROCESS

The above named individual refuses to wear color-coded alert wristbands.

- The benefits of the use of color-coded wristbands have been explained to me by a member of my healthcare team. I understand the risk and benefits of the use of color-coded wristbands, and despite this information, I do not give permission for the use of color-coded wristbands in my care.
- The risks of refusing to remove the “social cause” colored wristbands have been explained to me by a member of the health care team. I understand that refusing to remove the “social cause” wristband could cause confusion in my care, and despite this information, I do not give permission for the removal or covering with tape or gauze of the “social cause” colored wristband.

Reason provided (if any)

Date

Time

Signature

Relationship

Date

Time

Witness Signature

Job Title