

## THE FATAL FOUR

There are four major health issues identified in people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that have led to serious illnesses, infections, and sometimes death. They are called the Fatal Four: dehydration, seizures, choking/aspiration, and constipation.

## DEHYDRATION

### Causes of Dehydration

Diarrhea and vomiting  
Sweating excessively  
Fever  
Medication side effects

Medical conditions – diabetes undiagnosed or uncontrolled, kidney disease, Crohn’s disease  
Inability to communicate thirst  
Reliance on caregivers to provide fluids  
Aging changes that lead to dehydration

### Signs of Dehydration

Dry mouth  
Headache  
Dizzy/lightheaded  
Sleepy/difficult to arouse

Weak  
Thirsty  
Decrease in urination  
Dark concentrated urine

People with I/DD may also drink quickly, take drinks from others, and drink directly from water faucet.

### Be Proactive to Prevent Dehydration

- Provide personal water bottle when in the community
- Increase fluids when in the sun, and before, during, and after exercise
- Offer fluids between meals
- Follow the 8x8 rule - eight 8oz glasses per day
- Speak to physician for suggestions for those on a fluid restriction
- Educate person with I/DD to their ability of the importance of drinking fluids
- Avoid coffee, tea, and soda
- Offer creative types of fluids-Jell-O, Popsicles, soups
- Encourage fruits and vegetables with high water content
- Increase fluids for fever, diarrhea, and vomiting, when able to tolerate
- Be a role model and drink fluids throughout your shift

*Pay special attention to monitor the elderly as they are more susceptible to dehydration and thirst may not be a reliable sign of the need for water in this population. A better indicator of proper hydration is clear or light colored urine.*

**SEVERE DEHYDRATION MAY CAUSE SERIOUS PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS AND EVEN DEATH.**

Source: PA Dept. of Human Services PowerPoint on The Fatal Four, August 2018