NHS
National Patient Safety Agency
National Reporting and Learning Service

# Oxygen safety in hospitals: information for doctors and non-medical prescribers

In September 2009, the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) issued a Rapid Response Report (RRR) to all hospital settings with actions to improve oxygen safety. Full details are available from www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/type/alerts/

## Why did the NPSA do this?

Oxygen is one of the most common medicines used in hospital settings and should always be prescribed – except in emergencies, where oxygen should be given first and documented later. Oxygen can save lives by preventing severe hypoxaemia. However, there is a potential for serious harm and even death if it is not administered and managed appropriately. Common safety concerns from the review of incidents, local investigations and other sources are:

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| **Prescribing** | failure to or wrongly prescribed |
| **Monitoring** | patients not monitored, abnormal oxygen saturation levels not acted upon |
| **Administration** | confusion of oxygen with medical compressed air, incorrect flow rates, inadvertent disconnection of supply |
| **Equipment** | empty cylinders, faulty and missing equipment |

## What is the NPSA asking your organisation to do?

The NPSA has asked your organisation to:

- minimise the use of oxygen cylinders on wards;
- ensure reliable and adequate supplies of oxygen cylinders in transfer and emergency situations;
- assess the risks of confusing oxygen and medical compressed air;
- ensure that oxygen is prescribed and pulse oximetry is available
- ensure a multidisciplinary group has responsibility for the safe use of oxygen in your hospital.

## For staff prescribing oxygen: What can YOU do?

Because of the risks from poor oxygen management, medical staff should question:

- Have I prescribed oxygen for the patient?
- Have I recorded the target saturation on the drug chart/ in the medical notes?
- How can I recognise inadequate tissue oxygenation?
- How is oxygen best delivered and is humidification necessary?
- When should oxygen therapy be reviewed?
- If something has gone wrong, have I reported this as an incident?

**Further information at:** www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/type/alerts/
**Full clinical guidelines at:** www.brit-thoracic.org.uk