

Scottish Patient Safety Programme

National falls definition - summary document

This document provides a concise summary of the detailed falls definitions guidance. These definitions are for people receiving care in clinical settings.

Definition of a fall

“An event which results in a person coming to a rest unintentionally on the ground or floor or other lower level”.

Falls to be included in reporting:

Falls	Falls that meet the definition above where any part of the body touches the ground or lower surface.
Controlled falls	The person begins to fall but is assisted to another lower level by a staff member or another person to reduce the risk of injury.
Falls due to an environmental cause.	A fall due to environmental hazards, like slippery floors, uneven ground or being struck by a moving object.

Falls to be excluded from reporting:

External force from a person	A fall due to external force from another person(s), including the force of an object thrown by another person or person-to-person force, should be reported as per local policy.
Intentional fall	An intentional fall, where a person is observed deliberately descending to the ground, floor, or a lower level, should be reported in accordance with local policy.

Included or excluded from reporting depending on predictability:

Falls following a medical event

Included (could have been reasonably anticipated)	
Falls following a medical event that could have been reasonably anticipated	Falls that directly result from an acute episode or acute deterioration of a chronic medical condition. These events involve a temporary loss of consciousness, balance, or control, leading to a fall.
Excluded (could not have been reasonably anticipated)	
Upon review, a collapse resulting in a fall can be excluded from falls reporting if it could not have been reasonably anticipated and / or prevented. Context and patient history should be taken into consideration.	Falls that are secondary to unanticipated medical events. Upon review, a collapse resulting in a fall can be excluded from falls reporting if it could not have been reasonably anticipated and / or prevented. These events should be recorded in accordance with current local policy

Please note that where an event does not clearly fit the operational criteria, professional judgement can be applied in line with local adverse event reporting processes

Falls with harm – Risk matrix

The risk matrix will support consistent assessment and reporting of physical harm as a result of a fall.

The matrix aligns with the Health Improvement Scotland (HIS) [National Adverse Events Framework](#) and has drawn on prior work from NHS Lanarkshire.

Descriptor	Negligible - 1	Minor - 2	Moderate - 3	Major - 4	Extreme - 5
National Adverse Events Framework	Adverse event leading to minor injury NOT requiring first aid.	Minor injury or illness, first aid treatment required.	Injury requiring medical treatment. Injury (RIDDOR reportable) that results in >7 days incapacitation for routine work. Consideration of Organisational Duty of Candour.	Long term incapacity/disability requiring medical treatment. Specified RIDDOR injury; occupational disease or dangerous occurrences with/without a ≥ 7 day incapacitation for routine work. e.g. fractures, amputation, crush, serious burns. Consideration of Organisational Duty of Candour.	Any adverse event leading to death(s). Major permanent incapacity. RIDDOR reportable work-related fatality. Consideration of Organisational Duty of Candour.
Examples	Minor physical injury not requiring first aid, for example: - A fall that does not result in physical harm or injury - Short-term pain - Scratch, small bumps, grazes, redness, or slight bruising - Muscle/joint strain - Short-term feeling of emotional upset.	Minor physical injury requiring first aid, for example: - Cuts, bruising, sprains - Minor lacerations requiring sterile strips - Skin flaps.	Injury requiring medical treatment, for example: - Laceration requiring sutures. - Fractured fingers or toes. - Dislocation of fingers, thumbs, toes - Significant bruising - Internal injury requiring treatment and hospital stay longer than 7 days.	Injury resulting in long term incapacity or disability requiring medical/surgical treatment, for example: - Brain injury or suspected brain injury that requires urgent imaging, reversal of anticoagulation, transfusion of blood products or surgical intervention. - Fracture requiring cast or surgery. - Dislocation of wrists, ankles, hip, shoulder, knee or spine.	Injury resulting in death or major permanent physical incapacity, as a result of a fall, for example: - Fall contributing to death. - Permanent physical impairment as a result of a fall. - Unable to return to work.
Reporting category	Category 3	Category 2		Category 1	

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