

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

PATIENT SAFETY: Should You Color Code Tubes And Catheters To Prevent Tubing Misconnection Errors?

Find out about these little-known pitfalls.

Some safety experts suggest using color-coded tubes and catheters as a way to help staff identify the type of tubing a patient has in place.

But that approach could backfire, warns a recent Joint Commission sentinel alert, "Tubing misconnections--a persistent and potentially deadly occurrence." **How so?** Color-coding tubes and catheters "can lead users to rely on the color coding" rather than making sure they understand which tubes and catheters "are connected correctly to which body inlets," states the alert. " In addition, the facility would have to continually train and educate staff (including temporary agency and travel staff) about the institution's color-coding system.

A third reason to skip the color-coding: "Color-coding schemes often vary across institutions in the same community," creating increased risk when a facility uses agency and travel staff, cautions the alert.