

## ***How this all got started....***

In 2005, a hospital in Pennsylvania submitted a report to the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Reporting System (PA-PSRS) describing an event in which clinicians nearly failed to rescue a patient who had a cardiopulmonary arrest because the patient had been incorrectly designated as “DNR” (Do Not Resuscitate). The source of the confusion was that a nurse had incorrectly placed a yellow wristband on the patient. In this hospital, the color yellow signified that the patient should not be resuscitated. In a nearby hospital, in which this nurse also worked, yellow signified “restricted extremity,” meaning that this arm is not to be used for drawing blood or obtaining IV access. Fortunately in this case, another clinician identified the mistake and the patient was resuscitated. However, this “near miss” highlights a potential source of error and an opportunity to improve patient safety by re-evaluating the use of color-coded wristbands.\*

We want to thank and acknowledge this hospital for its transparency and disclosure of this event. It could have happened anywhere, and it has served as a “wake-up call” to many of us.

\*To view the entire report, go to [http://patientsafetyauthority.org/ADVISORIES/AdvisoryLibrary/2005/dec14\\_2\(suppl2\)/Pages/home.aspx](http://patientsafetyauthority.org/ADVISORIES/AdvisoryLibrary/2005/dec14_2(suppl2)/Pages/home.aspx)

## ***What about***

### ***North Carolina?***

North Carolina hospitals seek to provide safe and high-quality patient care. We accomplish this in several ways, one of which is to standardize the colors for “alert” wristbands. Most hospitals are adopting the same colors so, regardless of which hospital you work at today or tomorrow, the color for Allergy, Fall Risk, or “DNR” (Do Not Resuscitate) alert wristbands should be the same.

### ***The Big Picture***

This initiative is being adopted by hospitals throughout the nation. That means, whether you are traveling on vacation to these states or relocated to work in another state, participating hospitals will be using the following colors:

**RED means ALLERGY ALERT**

**YELLOW means FALL RISK**

**PURPLE means “DNR”**



North Carolina Hospital Association

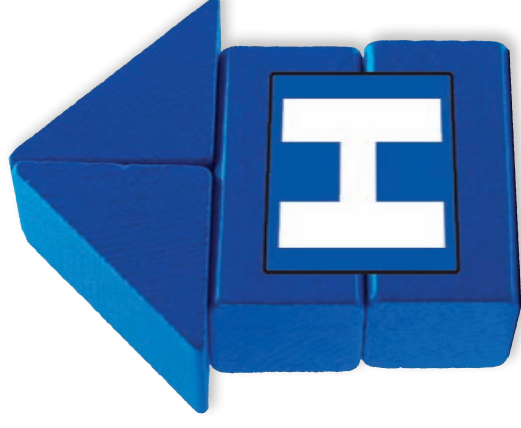


North Carolina Center  
Hospital Quality and Patient Safety

## **Staff Education Regarding:**

# **Color-coded “alert” wristbands**

*Information intended for  
all staff, clinical  
and non-clinical.*



## Color-coded “Alert” Wristbands – A Statewide Patient Safety Initiative

The North Carolina Center for Hospital Quality and Patient Safety conducted a survey in February 2009 of North Carolina hospitals to evaluate our risk for such an event. The results showed that nine different colors/methods were being used to designate the DNR status with patient wristbands.

**Our risk was apparent.**

We identified the need to standardize the colors being used for Allergies, Fall Risk, and DNR.

**Our answer is this project.**

**How to tell the patients what the different colors mean?**

**How** we say something is just as important as **what** we say. The next column is a script you can use to tell your patients/families about the color-coded “alert” wristbands and what they mean. If everyone says it the same, there is a better chance patients and families will understand what we are saying.

## SCRIPT For any staff person talking to a patient or family

**What is a Color-coded “alert” wristband?**  
Color-coded alert wristbands are used in hospitals to quickly communicate a certain healthcare status, condition, or “alert” that a patient may have. This is done so every staff member can provide the best care possible.

**What do the colors mean?**  
There are three different color-coded “alert” wristbands that we are going to discuss because they are the ones most commonly used.

**RED means ALLERGY ALERT**  
If a patient has an allergy to anything - food, medicine, dust, grass, pet hair, **ANYTHING** – tell us. It may not seem important to you but it could be very important in the care he/she receives.

**YELLOW means FALL RISK**  
We want to prevent falls at all times. Nurses review patients throughout their stay to determine if they need extra attention in order to prevent a fall. Sometimes a person may become weakened during his/her illness or following surgery. When a patient has this color-coded alert wristband, the nurse is saying this person needs to be assisted when walking or he/she may fall.

**PURPLE means “DNR” or Do Not Resuscitate**  
Some patients have expressed an end-of-life wish and we want to honor it.

## Other Risk Reduction Strategies Staff Should Know

### Color-coded “Alert” Wristbands/ Risk Reduction Strategies Quick Reference Card

1. Use wristbands with the alert message pre-printed (such as “DNR”).
2. Remove any “social cause” colored wristbands (such as “Live Strong”).
3. Remove wristbands that have been applied from another facility.
4. Initiate banding upon admission, changes in condition, or when information is received during the hospital stay.
5. Educate patients and family members regarding the wristbands.
6. Coordinate chart/white board/care plan/door signage information/stickers with same color coding.
7. Educate staff to verify patient color-coded “alert” wristbands upon assessment, hand-off of care, and facility-to-facility transfer communication.