



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND  
2748 WORTH ROAD  
JBSA FORT SAM HOUSTON, TEXAS 78234-6000

REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF

OTSG/MEDCOM Policy Memo 13-052

MCHO-CP-A

09 SEP 2013

Expires 9 September 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR Commanders, MEDCOM Regional Medical Commands

SUBJECT: Color-Coded Wristband Standardization for Patient Alerts

1. References:

a. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority, Pennsylvania Color of Safety Task Force,  
[http://patientsafetyauthority.org/EducationalTools/PatientSafetyTools/wristbands/Pages/wristband\\_manual.aspx](http://patientsafetyauthority.org/EducationalTools/PatientSafetyTools/wristbands/Pages/wristband_manual.aspx).

b. Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association, Safe and Sound: An Arizona Patient Safety Initiative, Color-Coded Wristband Standardization in Arizona Toolkit,  
[http://www.azhha.org/patient\\_safety/wristbandtoolkit.pdf](http://www.azhha.org/patient_safety/wristbandtoolkit.pdf).

c. American Hospital Association, Implementing Standardized Colors for Patient Alert Wristbands, 4 September 2008, <http://www.aha.org/advocacy-issues/tools-resources/advisory/2008/080904-quality-adv.pdf>.

d. US Army Medical Command (MEDCOM) Regulation 40-59, Standardization of Inpatient Falls Risk Assessment and Documentation Falls prevention Program, 21 June 2011.

2. Purpose: To clearly define the process for identifying and communicating patient-specific risk factors, alerts, or special needs by standardizing the implementation of color-coded alert wristbands based on patient assessment, the patient's wishes and the patient's medical status.

3. Proponent: The proponent for this policy is the Clinical Performance Assurance Directorate, Patient Safety Program.

4. Applicability: This policy applies to all parent Army Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) and their subordinate facilities.

5. Background:

Ineffective communication can be a leading factor in the occurrence of sentinel and adverse events in Army MTFs and in medical facilities throughout the Military Health System and civilian sector. The use of color-coded alert wristbands provides an effective communication tool that can reduce such occurrences in Army MTFs.

b. On a national level, over 37 States have voluntarily adopted a standardized set of colors that medical facilities must use to convey certain medical alerts or conditions. The American Hospital Association has also endorsed the use of standardized color-coded alert wristbands.

6. Policy: All Army MTFs must adhere to the following prescribed use of color-coded alert wristbands.

a. Other programs or initiatives related to the use of color-coded alert wristbands (for example, the Braselow color-coded wristband system) are prohibited in MTFs.

b. Wristbands applied by another medical facility will be removed upon admission or transfer into the MTF.

c. Patient and Family education will be conducted on the purpose and meaning of color-coded alert (hospital) wristbands as well as the risks associated with wearing community or social cause bands in the medical facility. Staff education will include an instruction to verify the purpose and meaning of the color-coded alert wristbands when conducting patient assessments, care hand-offs, and transfers.

7. Standard Procedures:

a. During the initial assessments and reassessment procedures, risk factors associated with falls, allergies, DNR status, or restricted extremities are to be identified or modified. Any patient demonstrating risk factors will have a color-coded alert wristband placed on the same extremity as the admission ID band. That color-coded alert wristband must conform to the risk reduction strategies (Appendix A) and use of authorized colors (Appendix B) enclosed.

b. DNR: The determination of a "Do Not Resuscitate" order must be consistent with MTF policy and procedures and must be documented in the patient's medical record prior to the nurse placing the DNR wristband on the patient. The color coded alert wristband serves as an alert and does not take the place of an order.

c. Medical record: It should be documented in the patient's medical record that the color-coded alert wristband was applied in accordance with MTF policy. Except in emergency situations, no handwriting will be applied to the color-coded alert wristbands.

d. Retention of the color-coded alert wristband: Upon application of the color-coded alert wristband, the nurse will instruct each patient and Family Member that the wristband must not be removed by them during the hospitalization.

e. Color-coded alert wristband removal for treatment: In the event that any color-coded alert wristband has to be removed for treatment of the patient, the nurse will remove the wristband. A new color-coded alert wristband will be made, risks reconfirmed, and the new wristband immediately placed on another extremity by the nurse.

f. Patient refusal: If the patient is capable but refuses to wear the MTF color-coded wristband, an explanation of the risks will be provided to the patient and Family Member(s). The nurse will reinforce that it is their opportunity to participate in efforts to prevent errors, and it is their responsibility as part of the team. The nurse will document in the medical record patient refusals and the explanation provided.

g. Patient/Family involvement and education: When a color-coded alert wristband is applied, the patient and Family Member(s) are educated regarding the wristband message (meaning and purpose). Appendix C is an example of a poster that may be used for patient education.

h. Hand-off and Discharge: The nurse will reconfirm color-coded alert wristbands with the patient, his/her Family Member(s), other caregivers receiving the patient in transfer, and the patient's chart before invasive procedures, at transfer, and during changes in level of care. Color-coded alert wristbands are not removed at discharge. For home discharges, the patient is advised to remove the color-coded alert wristband at home or at his/her final destination.

i. Staff education: Staff education regarding color-coded alert wristbands will occur during the hospital and unit/service level orientation process and reinforced as indicated by MTF leadership. All competencies will be documented in the staff's competency file or other related files in accordance with MTF Policy. Appendix D is an example of a poster that may be used for staff education.

j. Compliance: MTFs must adhere to the above prescribed use of color-coded alert wristbands. MTFs must ensure the availability of prescribed color-coded bands and ensure the color-coded bands are utilized.

FOR THE COMMANDER:



ULDRIC L. FIORE, JR.  
Chief of Staff

## **Appendix A**

### **Risk reduction strategies:**

(1) Color-coded alert wristbands will contain preprinted or embossed text clarifying the intent or message (for example, Allergy, Fall Risk, DNR, Latex Allergy, or Extremity Restriction).

(2) Except in alternate marking method (Universal Protocol, MC Policy 40-54) and emergency situations, no handwriting will be applied to the color-coded alert wristbands. Reason for not writing on bands:

a. Legibility may hinder the correct interpretation of the allergy listed.

b. Someone could assume that the list of allergies written on the wristband is comprehensive. Some patients have numerous allergies.

c. New allergies may be discovered during the hospitalization, but may not be written on the allergy band.

(3) Color-coded alert wristbands should only be applied or removed by a nurse, preferably the nurse conducting an assessment.

(4) If labels, stickers, or other visual cues are used to communicate risk factors, medical alerts, or wristband application in the medical record, white board, or door signage, those cues will use the same corresponding color and text as the color-coded alert wristband.

(5) Patients are prohibited from wearing non-MTF (community or social cause) wristbands in the hospital setting. Community or social cause wristbands include but are not limited to charity and fashion bands (example, a yellow "Live Strong" band). Nurses will ask patients to remove non-MTF wristbands to prevent confusion with the MTF color-coded alert wristbands. If a patient refuses, then the nurse will explain the risks to that patient and then document the refusal and any reason given for it in the medical record. The nurse may further discuss with a supervisor any options (such as covers) to minimize the confusion that an unremoved non-MTF wristband might cause.

## **Appendix B**

### **Authorized Colors:**

(a) Clear or white: Used for patient identification. May also be used as alternate site marking process to comply with Universal protocol MEDCOM Regulation 40-54. The patient identification and admission wristband may be applied by non-clinical staff.

(b) Red: Used to identify patients with allergies, excluding latex allergies (see (f) green below). Allergies include those to medication(s), food, environmental allergens, or other substances that may cause an allergic reaction in the patient. The allergies should be written in the patient's medical record in accordance with MTF policy. The word "Allergy" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(c) Yellow: Used to identify a patient at risk for falling (Fall Risk). Staff should conduct the Falls Risk Assessment and apply the yellow wristband in accordance with MEDCOM Regulation 40-59. The words "Fall Risk" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(d) Purple: Used to identify a patient with a "Do Not Resuscitate" order written/included in the medical record. The letters "DNR" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

(e) Pink: Used to identify a patient with a restricted extremity or to indicate the extremity that should not be used for starting an IV or phlebotomy. A pink wristband can be used to indicate any diagnosis that results in a restricted extremity. The words "Restricted Extremity" will be embossed/pre-printed on the wristband.

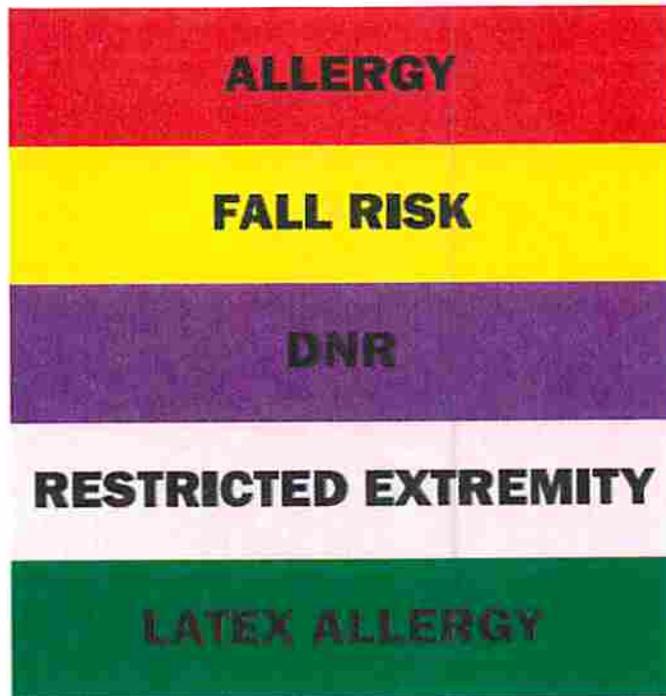
(f) Green: Used to identify a patient with an allergy to latex. The latex allergy should be noted via an order in the patient's medical record. The words "Latex Allergy" will be embossed/preprinted on the wristband.

Appendix C  
Patient Education Poster Example



# LET'S BAND TOGETHER

**P  
A  
T  
I  
E  
N  
T**



**S  
A  
F  
E  
T  
Y**

**ALLERGY** - Red band communicates an allergy.

**FALL RISK** - Yellow communicates a risk of falling.

**DNR** - Communicated by a purple band

**RESTRICTED EXTREMITY** - Pink communicates a restricted extremity.

**LATEX ALLERGY** - Green communicates an allergy to latex.

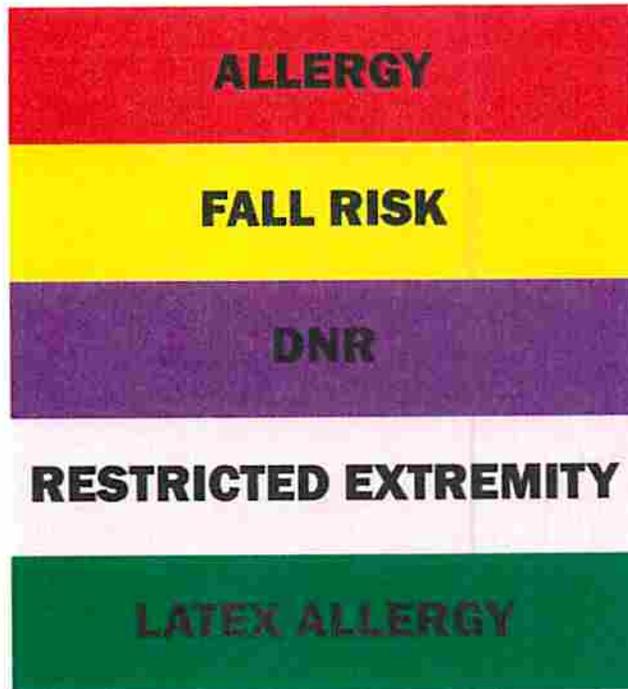
We will ask you to remove any colored wristbands that could be confused with the standardized wristbands and only wear the bands applied by your nursing staff.



Appendix D  
Medical Staff Education Poster Example



# BANDING FOR PATIENT SAFETY



### COLOR-CODED ALERT WRISTBANDS

**RED:** Used to identify patients with allergies.

**YELLOW:** Used to identify a patient at risk for falling.

**PURPLE:** Used to identify a patient with a "Do Not Resuscitate" order written/included in the medical record in accordance with MTF policy and procedures.

**PINK:** Used to identify a patient with a restricted extremity or to indicate the extremity that should not be used for starting an IV or phlebotomy.

**GREEN:** Used to identify a patient with an allergy to latex.

Except in alternate marking method (Universal Protocol, MC Policy 40-54) and emergency situations, no handwriting will be applied to the color-coded alert wristbands.

Remove any colored wristbands that could be confused with the standardized wristbands and only wear the bands applied by your nursing staff.

