



Sentinel Events

A sentinel event is defined by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) as any unanticipated event in a healthcare setting resulting in death or serious physical or psychological injury to a person or persons, not related to the natural course of the patient's illness.

- Serious injury specifically includes loss of limb or gross motor function.
- It includes any event for which a recurrence would carry a risk of a serious adverse outcome.
- Such events are called "sentinel" because they signal the need for immediate investigation and response.
- Sentinel events are identified under JCAHO accreditation policies to help assist in analysis and development of preventable measures.
- The Joint Commission tracks events to ensure events are adequately analyzed and undesirable trends or decreases in performance are caught early and mitigated.

Examples of specific Sentinel Events requiring review:

- Any patient death, paralysis, coma, or other major permanent loss of function associated with a medication error.
- A patient commits suicide within 72 hours of being discharged from a hospital setting that provided staffed around-the-clock care.
- Any elopement that is unauthorized departure, of a patient from and around-the-clock care setting resulting in a temporally related death (suicide, accidental death, or homicide) or permanent loss of function.
- A hospital operates on the wrong side of the patient's body.
- Any intrapartum (related to birth process) maternal death.
- Any perinatal death unrelated to a congenital condition in an infant having a birth weight greater than 2,500 grams.
- A patient is abducted from the hospital where he or she receives care, treatment or services.
- Assault, homicide, or other crime resulting in patient death or major permanent loss of function.
- A patient fall that results in death or major permanent loss of function as a direct result of the injuries sustained in the fall.
- Hemolytic transfusion reaction involving major blood group incompatibilities.
- A foreign body, such as sponge or forceps that was left in a patient after surgery.

Note: An adverse outcome that is *directly related* to the natural course of the patient's illness or underlying condition, for example, terminal illness present at the time of presentation, is **not** reportable **except** for suicide in, or following elopement from a 24-hour care setting.

Please be aware of what constitutes a sentinel event and refer to your specific organizations Sentinel Event Policy.

Adapted from 2007 JCAHO Guidelines