

Sentinel Event

The Joint Commission considers the following list of events, though not comprehensive, to be sentinel events if they occur under any Joint Commission–accredited health care organization

- Death caused by self-inflicted injurious behavior if any of the following apply:
 - While in a health care setting
 - Within 7 days of discharge from inpatient services
 - Within 7 days of discharge from emergency department (ED)
- Unanticipated death of a full-term infant.
- Homicide of any patient receiving care, treatment, and services while on site at the organization or while under the care or supervision of the organization.
- Homicide of a staff member, licensed independent practitioner, visitor, or vendor while on site at the organization or while providing care or supervision to patients.
- Any intrapartum maternal death.
- **Severe maternal morbidity¹** (leading to **permanent harm² or severe harm³**).
- **Sexual abuse/assault⁴** of any patient receiving care, treatment, and services while on site at the organization or while under the care or supervision of the organization.
- Sexual abuse/assault of a staff member, licensed independent practitioner, visitor, or vendor while on site at the organization or while providing care or supervision to patients.
- Physical assault (leading to death, permanent harm, or severe harm) of any patient receiving care, treatment, and services while on site at the organization or while under the care or supervision of the organization.
- Surgery or other **invasive procedure⁵** performed at the wrong site, on the wrong patient, or that is the wrong (unintended) procedure for a patient regardless of the type of procedure or the magnitude of the outcome.
- Discharge of an infant to the wrong family.
- Abduction of any patient receiving care, treatment, and services.
- Any elopement (that is, unauthorized departure) of a patient from a staffed around the-clock care setting (including the ED), leading to death, permanent harm, or severe harm to the patient.
- Administration of blood or blood products having unintended ABO and non-ABO (Rh, Duffy, Kell, Lewis, and other clinically important blood groups) incompatibilities, hemolytic transfusion reactions, or transfusions resulting in death, permanent harm, or severe harm.
- Unintended retention of a foreign object in a patient after an invasive procedure, including surgery.
- Severe neonatal hiperbilirrubinemia (bilirubin >30mg/dL.).
- Fluoroscopy resulting in permanent tissue injury when clinical and technical optimization were not implemented and/or recognized practice parameters were not followed.
- Any delivery of radiotherapy to the wrong patient, wrong body region, unintended procedure, or >25% above the planned radiotherapy dose.

- Fire, flame, or unanticipated smoke, heat, or flashes occurring during direct patient care caused by equipment operated and used by the organization. To be considered a sentinel event, equipment must be in use at the time of the event; staff do not need to be present.
- Fall in a staffed-around-the-clock care setting or fall in a care setting not staffed around the clock during a time when staff are present resulting in any of the following:
 - Any fracture
 - Surgery, casting, or traction
 - Required consult/management or comfort care for a neurological (for example, skull fracture, subdural or intracranial hemorrhage) or internal (for example, rib fracture, small liver laceration) injury
 - A patient with coagulopathy who receives blood products as a result of the fall.
 - Death or permanent harm as a result of injuries sustained from the fall (not from physiologic events causing the fall).

Key Terms

1. **Severe maternal morbidity** - A patient safety event that occurs from the intrapartum through the immediate postpartum period (24 hours), requiring the transfusion of 4 or more units of packed red blood cells (PRBC) and/or admission to the intensive care unit (ICU). Admission to the ICU is defined as admission to a unit that provides 24-hour medical supervision and can provide mechanical ventilation or continuous vasoactive drug support. Sources: American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Society of Maternal- Fetal Medicine.
2. **Permanent harm** - An event or condition that reaches the individual, resulting in any level of harm that permanently alters and/or affects an individual's baseline health.
3. **Severe harm** - An event or condition that reaches the individual, resulting in life-threatening bodily injury (including pain or disfigurement) that interferes with or results in loss of functional ability or quality of life that requires continuous physiological monitoring and/or surgery, invasive procedure, or treatment to resolve the condition.
4. **Sexual abuse/assault** - Nonconsensual sexual contact, including oral, vaginal, or anal penetration or fondling of the individual's sex organ(s) by another individual. One or more of the following must be present to determine that the incident is a sentinel event:
 - Any staff-witnessed sexual contact as described above
 - Admission by the perpetrator that sexual contact, as described above, occurred on the organization's premises
 - Sufficient clinical evidence obtained by the health care organization to support allegations of unconsented sexual contact
5. **Invasive procedure** - A procedure in which skin or mucous membranes and/or connective tissue are incised or punctured, an instrument is introduced through a natural body orifice, or foreign material is inserted into the body for diagnostic or treatment-related purposes. Examples of invasive procedures include central line and chest tube insertions, biopsies and excisions, and all percutaneous procedures (for example, cardiac, electrophysiology, interventional radiology). Exclusions include venipuncture, which is defined as a collection of blood from a vein. Note: This exclusion is still considered a patient safety event and should be reviewed by the appropriate local quality and safety teams.