

## Basic Facts about Wheelchairs

**Brakes:** There is a separate brake for each side of the wheelchair. Brake function varies from chair to chair; some brakes are pushed out and some are pushed in to activate. Brakes are located on the large rear wheels toward the front of the chair. The chair should not be left unattended unless the brakes are engaged. The brakes should be securely engaged when a person is moved in or out of the chair.

**Armrests:** These may be removed in order to give the student more room to grasp the wheel for movement. Transportation personnel should not remove armrests or other parts of the wheelchair without authorization. Never lift a wheelchair by its armrests as this may cause the armrests to come out or the chair to tip.

**Footrests:** The footrests may be out of the field of vision of the person pushing a wheelchair. Therefore, caution must be exercised to avoid colliding with obstructions and jarring the person in the chair.

**Wheels:** Loose clothing, scarves, etc., must be kept away from the wheels. The rim of the centre of one of the large wheels and any stationary part of the front of the wheelchair should be held to lift it into a trunk.

**Security Belts/Inserts:** Passengers who cannot sit unsupported, or who are in danger of serious injury from a fall, should always wear security belts when in wheelchairs/mobility aids or bus seats. Inserts can be made for most chairs, and these often come equipped with their own seat-belt system. If there is a security belt in the chair, it is meant to be used. The security belt must never be used to substitute for a motor vehicle seat belt. The driver and/or adult supervisors if present must be aware of the following safety procedures and precautions concerning the operation of the wheelchair

**Wheelchair Restraint System.** A manual system customarily consists of 4 securement belts that attach to the vehicle and the wheelchair. Once the client positions their wheelchair, another person, attaches the belts to the floor and to the wheelchair. When the client wants to leave the vehicle the assistant must undo the belts. These systems are very universal and can be used on a large variety of wheelchairs.

Tie-down points—A wheelchair has to have brackets or tie-down points already designed and incorporated by the manufacturer as suitable for securing a wheelchair to a vehicle. Tie-down points that are incorporated after manufacture or design may not be as strong or may weaken the wheelchair frame.

The following mobility devices are unsuitable for use in vehicles due to potentially hazardous design construction features. These include (but are not limited to):

- Lightweight 'stroller' type wheelchairs
- Wheelchairs or mobility scooters where the seat is attached to the base via a single post (often featured with a swivel-style seat)
- Any wheelchair or mobility scooter that features projections at the front, such as a tiller, as these may be hazardous in the event of an accident.
- Any user of a mobility scooter, or one of the wheelchair types mentioned above, must transfer into one of the passengers seats of the vehicle during transit and cannot travel seated on their mobility device.

The user may transfer to a passenger seat either before or after their wheelchair or scooter has been loaded into the vehicle depending on their capabilities and the design of the vehicle.

**Occupant Restraints –**

All individuals riding in motor vehicles must use a lap and shoulder belt. In many cases aftermarket seatbelts are used for those riding in wheelchairs due to the needed adjustment and disassembly. Modifications may also be needed for OEM seating positions or seating positions that may be shared by disabled and able bodied individuals. Always keep in mind that seatbelts and their anchorages need to comply with FMVSS regulations. Aftermarket seatbelts should come with instructions for installation. Following their instructions properly is your path to compliance.

***Special Considerations:*** All clients using restraint systems to secure their wheelchair and themselves need to also use lap and shoulder seatbelts.