

Parent Resources

Important Considerations When Buying a New Wheelchair

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As you prepare to purchase or upgrade a wheelchair for your child, it is important to choose one that works well at school as well as at home. Considering your options before making such a substantial purchase will ensure that your child's wheelchair is equipped for most environments. The ultimate consideration is choosing a wheelchair that meets the specifications prescribed by your child's doctor. Comfort and support are extremely important, but the wheelchair also needs to be able to fit and maneuver in common places. It could be frustrating if the wheelchair does not maneuver well in locations that your child needs to go to on a regular basis. The following information should help when making an informed decision on a wheelchair that is functional at home, at school and out in the community.

- **Doorways** – The ADA requirement for doorways is a minimum clear width of 32 inches. Clear width is measured from the face of the door to the opposite stop when the door is open at least 90 degrees.
- **Bus lifts** – Standard lift platform sizes range from a minimum of 30 inches up to 34 inches in width, and a minimum of 48 inches up to 54 inches in length.
- **Bus aisles** – The aisle on the bus for wheelchairs is 30 inches.
- **Protruding equipment** – Arm rests, wheel braces/brackets, batteries or other

equipment that sticks out from the frame of the wheelchair must be included in the measurement. Such protrusions could cause the wheelchair to be too wide to fit through a doorway or on the bus lift.

- **WC19-compliant wheelchairs** – WC19 is a U.S. standard approved in 2000 by the American National Standards Institute/ Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (ANSI/RESNA). It is a voluntary industry standard that addresses the design and performance of wheelchairs when used as seats in motor vehicles. The standard requires that the wheelchair and securements be crash-tested at 30 mph with an appropriately sized crash-test dummy seated in the wheelchair. For details and a list of WC19-compliant wheelchairs, go to <http://www.ercwvts.pitt.edu/WC19.html>.
- **Occupant restraints** – An occupant-restraint system (or seat belt) must be attached to the wheelchair to ensure safe transportation. The shoulder belt should fit securely across the shoulder and chest, not too high that it cuts across the neck. The lap belt should fit securely across the pelvic bone, not across the waist (which could cause internal injury if an accident occurs).
- **Anchor points for wheelchair tie downs** – Wheelchairs transported on the bus are secured with tie downs attached from anchor points on the wheelchair to the bus. Tie downs must be able to be secured at the appropriate angle

(45-80 degrees) to avoid movement of the wheelchair during transport. Anchor points on some styles of wheelchairs (such as the stroller variety) are too low, which prevents an appropriate angle for the tie down. Although the wheelchair might not move forward or backward, the tie downs may not prevent side-to-side movement, which could result in a wheelchair tipping over during transport.

Checklist for purchasing a wheelchair

The following important questions should be answered before purchasing a wheelchair to ensure it is conducive to the school environment.

- What is the narrowest door, hallway or aisle that your child needs to access?
- Does the wheelchair fit in the classroom, restroom, cafeteria, playground, etc.?
- Does the size of the chair allow your child to effectively participate in classroom and P.E. activities without hindering learning?
- If your child rides the school bus, is the wheelchair WC19 compliant (crash-tested) to be safely transported on the school bus?
- Can the wheelchair safely fit on the bus lift?
- Does the wheelchair have appropriate and easily accessible anchor points to be secured on the school bus?
- Does the wheelchair have the required occupant restraints for safe transportation on the school bus?



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