

# Health Care Advice

## ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND EQUIPMENT

### Therapeutic Tubs

This item is primarily used for workers who are severely impaired. Workers are considered severely impaired if their disabilities/impairments are:

- permanent and have been rated for either permanent disability (PD) benefits totaling at least 100%, or non-economic loss (NEL) benefits totaling at least 60%, or
- likely to be permanent in the opinion of a WSIB medical consultant, and are likely to meet one of the criteria above (Operational Policy 17-06-02).

#### General Description

A number of terms may be used for these items, including whirlpool tubs, hot tubs, or therapeutic tubs.

A whirlpool is similar to a bathtub, and contains “jets” that force water out to massage specific areas of the body. Walk-in style whirlpool tubs have a side door opening. There is a small step to climb when getting in/out of these tubs. As there is a side door opening, the worker must remain seated in the bath while the water fills and drains.

A “hot tub” is a larger device, and is

situated in a different location in or outside of the home. A hot tub will fit a number of individuals.

#### Guiding Principles

A therapeutic tub may be considered for a worker who is severely impaired due to a work-related injury/disease, and it is considered clinically necessary for the treatment of the work-related injury/disease in the long term. Prior to considering a therapeutic tub, all other appropriate and cost-effective devices or therapeutic modalities should be evaluated to determine if they can meet the worker’s needs.

**Note:** As there is little research available that supports or disputes the use of therapeutic tubs in the home for pain management, spasm reduction, or increasing range of motion, careful consideration of the clinical need and rationale will be required on a case-by-case basis.

#### Relevant Operational Policies

*Entitlement to Health Care, 17-01-02*  
*Independent Living Allowance, 17-06-02*  
*Independent Living Devices, 17-06-03*

**NOTICE:** This document is intended to assist WSIB decision-makers in reaching consistent decisions in similar fact situations and to supplement applicable WSIB policies and guidelines as set out in the Operational Policy Manual (OPM). This document is **not a policy** and in the event of a conflict between this document and an OPM policy or guideline, the decision-maker will rely on the latter.

#### Considerations

What is needed	WSIB considerations
Information that identifies what problems have resulted from the significant work-related injury/disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The worker must have a 100% PD or 60% NEL.</li><li>• The rationale for the therapeutic tub must be due to work-related injury/disease.</li></ul>
A written recommendation and rationale for a therapeutic tub from a physician <b>and</b> from another health professional.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medical clearance for use of a therapeutic tub must be obtained prior to considering allowance of the tub.</li></ul> <p><b>Note:</b> A recommendation (e.g., prescription from a physician) without medical rationale is not sufficient.</p>
Therapeutic tub must address a permanent or long-term need related to the treatment of the work-related injury/disease.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If condition is temporary and expected to improve, purchase of a therapeutic tub is not appropriate.</li><li>• There are risks associated with the use of a therapeutic tub, especially if the worker has a variety of clinical conditions.</li><li>• If unclear, clarify prognosis/long term need for therapeutic tub with treating health professional.</li></ul>

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## Functional and Clinical Information

As indicated above, a physician must assess the worker and provide a written recommendation and rationale for a therapeutic tub. Due to potential health risks in using these devices, only after a report providing medical clearance and identifying any medical restrictions is obtained can further assessment be completed to ensure a therapeutic tub is a safe and appropriate device for the worker.

Once the physician’s report is reviewed, a decision can be made as to whether there is sufficient

justification/rationale to proceed with a referral for further functional information with a health professional. The health professional should have experience with therapeutic tubs.

The information is submitted to the Service Delivery Team for review. This report will:

- clarify the clinical rationale for the therapeutic tub in the treatment of the work-related injury/disease, and
- recommend specific features required for the worker’s needs.

## Physician’s Report

Information required	WSIB considers
<p>Is there a description of the worker’s medical status, including whether the worker has any medical conditions/contraindications that may pose a danger to health and safety if using this device?</p> <p>Medical conditions of concern may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high blood pressure (risk of cardiac complications),</li> <li>• orthostatic hypotension (risk of loss of consciousness),</li> <li>• decreased sensation (risk of burns),</li> <li>• history of seizures (risk of head injury or drowning),</li> <li>• skin integrity issues (risk of infection).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the use of a therapeutic tub is likely to cause or exacerbate medical conditions, <b>or</b></li> <li>• If there are medical conditions of concern but they are being controlled and will not pose a health and safety risk with use of a therapeutic tub.</li> </ul>
<p>Is there a symptom management plan in place, and why is it not sufficient to meet the worker’s medical needs?</p> <p>For example, a pain management plan may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exercise program,</li> <li>• physiotherapy/chiropractic treatment,</li> <li>• massage therapy,</li> <li>• medication,</li> <li>• TENS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine what pain management strategies have been tried, and whether further strategies could be of benefit (e.g., out-patient pain management program).</li> <li>• A medication review by a nurse case manager may be considered if pain is not being adequately controlled.</li> <li>• If therapy is ongoing, need to consider whether maximum medical recovery has been achieved. If maximum medical recovery has not been achieved, determination of whether or not the worker is severely impaired may not be able to be made. If not severely impaired, a therapeutic tub cannot be considered.</li> </ul>
<p>What are the expected benefits/goals from use of a therapeutic tub in the treatment/management of the work-related injury/disease?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals should include increased participation in activities of daily living.</li> <li>• Expected long term benefits should be considered (i.e., determine whether benefits are only temporary, during and immediately following submersion in the therapeutic tub). If this is the case a therapeutic tub may not be the most appropriate device for the worker.</li> </ul>

Functional information required	WSIB considers
<p>What is the functional and clinical rationale which supports the use of a therapeutic tub and what are the anticipated benefits to the work-related injury/disease?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the worker's daily activities are significantly restricted by muscle spasms, and/or contractures.</li> <li>• The rationale must be related to symptom management of the work-related injury/disease.</li> </ul>
<p>What simpler, more cost-effective alternative devices or therapeutic modalities were considered and why do they not meet the worker's needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A therapeutic tub is not the only available option to address difficulties with pain management, contractures, or muscle spasms.</li> <li>• All other appropriate and more cost-effective alternative options should have been evaluated and an explanation as to why they are not possibilities for meeting the worker's needs.</li> <li>• More cost-effective alternative devices may include moist heat packs, a regular hot bath, stretching, or attending community programs.</li> <li>• WSIB will consider payment of the most cost-effective alternative device or therapeutic modality that is clinically necessary.</li> </ul>
<p>Information that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the worker is able to safely and independently (if appropriate) use the therapeutic tub.</li> <li>• identifies any issues of concern, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ability to transfer safely/balance,</li> <li>• any cognitive and perceptual impairments,</li> <li>• any impaired sensation,</li> <li>• any skin problems/risks,</li> <li>• other medical concerns.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• describes any expected changes to the worker's condition in the long term.</li> <li>• discusses if the worker's condition is expected to change, identifies if the therapeutic tub will be appropriate or can be modified to accommodate the change.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> <i>Therapeutic tubs</i> are often larger and deeper than regular bathtubs, and may be more difficult to transfer in and out of safely.</p> <p><i>Walk-in therapeutic tubs</i> have a side door opening. In such instances however, the worker must be able to negotiate a step into the tub.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The worker must be deemed safe to use the therapeutic tub or a caregiver must be available to provide needed assistance, or it is deemed that with assistive devices, the worker will be safe (e.g., grab bars, bath lift, ceiling track lift).</li> <li>• Ensure the therapeutic tub is still the most appropriate device if worker's condition is expected to deteriorate.</li> </ul>
<p>Was the therapeutic tub tried? Where?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worker should have tried a therapeutic tub and have had demonstrated benefits (e.g., use of therapeutic tub in a community setting).</li> <li>• These benefits should be identified (e.g., increased range of motion for a specified period of time following use of therapeutic tub, decreased frequency or duration of spasms).</li> </ul>
<p>Does the therapeutic tub fit into the current accommodations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a suitable location in the home for this device.</li> <li>• If home modifications may be required, Service Delivery Team members should contact the <b>Serious Injury Program</b> for information on how to access the preferred supplier.</li> </ul>

If the available information is not sufficient, consult with the health professional who provided the information for clarification.

## **Maintenance/Repair**

The WSIB pays for maintenance, normal inspection, repair and replacement of independent living devices (that cost over \$250) unless the damage is due to misuse or to not following the warranty or operating instructions. Workers must ensure proper maintenance is carried out.

Health Services  
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