

## DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN | **PICA**



**PICA** is defined as the compulsive and recurrent consumption of non-nutritive/non-food items. A PICA event occurs when the non-food item is swallowed/ingested.

### **PICA Attempt**

A PICA attempt occurs when an individual tries to ingest (swallow) the non-nutritive/non-food item but the item is not ingested.

### **Mouthing**

Mouthing items is not considered PICA. It involves placing non-food items in the mouth and manipulating them without the intent to ingest the item.

### **Things to Know**

- PICA is observed with a high frequency in the Developmental Disabilities/Intellectual Disabilities population
- Both PICA and PICA attempts involve intent to swallow the non-food item
- PICA can be a learned behavior that achieves a specific result for the person when he/she engages in the practice and can warrant independent clinical attention from a behavior analyst

### **Non-food Items Commonly Ingested**

- Gloves
- Batteries
- Paper Clips
- Hair
- Dirt
- Buttons/ Zippers
- Thread/Strings
- Pebbles
- Cloth items
- Bottle Caps



*Disclaimer: Please note this list is not all encompassing and all non-food items should be considered.*

### **Possible reasons for PICA**

- Medical Issues
- Learned behavior
- Other psychiatric conditions
- Inability to discriminate food and non-food items
- Mineral deficiencies
- Dietary/Caloric intake deficiencies
- Loss of opportunity to eat by mouth
- Dementia/Alzheimer
- Taste or texture preferences or aversions



## PICA Risks

- Mouth Injuries
- Choking/Aspiration
- Perforation of the esophagus and/or stomach
- Bowel obstruction/blockage



- An individual may require a behavior support plan to address PICA behavior
- Implement approved strategies to redirect or block PICA attempts
- Increased supervision levels may also be required and should be approved by the IDT



## PICA Assessment

- Have PICA assessed by a medical professional to treat or exclude any medical issues
- If medical issues are excluded, a Behavioral Analyst can complete a functional behavior assessment to determine the rationale for PICA behavior and identify a functional replacement behavior

## Implementing environmental strategies to prevent the occurrence of PICA:

- Identify item(s) that are ingested
- Alert all who work or live with the individual of PICA diagnosis and their preferred non-food items to ingest
- Discuss changes to the environment with the Human Rights Committee (HRC) and/or Behavior Management for approval in licensed settings
- Clear the environment of items that the person is known to ingest

## What to do if a PICA event occurs

- Ingesting non-food substances may result in choking; therefore 911 should be called immediately
- PICA incidents require an evaluation at a medical facility to determine if the substance/object needs to be removed or if the issue is resolved
- An incident report must be completed when a PICA ingestion happens
- The IDT should meet to identify a plan of action to prevent future occurrences of PICA

