

Non-lethal Strangulation in Domestic and Family Violence

Health Response Flowchart

- Non-lethal strangulation in domestic and family violence (DFV):
- Has cumulative health impacts
 - May cause serious injuries to the structures in the neck that are not visible to the eye, and for which there may be delayed and/or generalised symptoms
 - Health impacts can include permanent neurological damage, damage to the arteries that may be linked to stroke & may be delayed hours, days or weeks, damage to the hyoid bone that can impede airways, and psychological trauma
 - Is a significant indicator of a dangerous escalation in violence and a major risk factor for domestic homicide.

ASK

Evidence shows that in most cases of strangulation there are few or no external signs of injury.

If you know/suspect a client has experienced domestic violence, ask them directly - *Has your partner tried to strangle/choke/suffocate you?*
If so, how many times?

CHECK

SIGNS

Red eyes, petechiae in eyes, petechiae on skin on or above the neck, neck swelling or bruising, ligature marks on neck, droopy eyelid or face, tongue injury, lip injury, poor coordination, confusion

SYMPTOMS

Neck pain, jaw pain, sore throat, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, vision changes, hearing changes, tinnitus, light headedness, headache, muscle weakness, voice changes, memory loss

KEY INDICATORS FOR SERIOUSNESS:

Client reports:
1. Loss of consciousness;
2. Loss of bowel &/or bladder control;
3. Difficulty breathing &/or developed a cough &/or changes to voice;
4. Thought she would die

USE CLINICAL JUDGEMENT AND CONSULT

to assess the need for further radiological tests & treatment

INFORM & REFER

Inform your clients of the risks, symptoms, and possible health outcomes to enable informed decision-making.

Ask if the client would like to make a report to the police, and/or if they would like a referral to a specialist support worker.

HHS Social Worker PH: _____.

Specialist DFV Service PH: _____.

Refer to the [DFV Information Sharing Flowchart for Health Workers](#) to guide your approach to sharing and requesting information.

DOCUMENT

- Document the client's reported experiences of non-lethal strangulation, signs and symptoms, treatment and referrals
- Include information about the non-lethal strangulation presentation in the discharge letter, including recommendations for follow up care
- Strangulation in DFV is a standalone criminal offence in Queensland. You are not required to report the crime to the police, but health records may be subpoenaed.