

Medical Emergencies

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What is First Aid?

First aid refers to the immediate assistance provided to someone who is injured or suddenly taken ill, using whatever materials are on hand. It can range from simple tasks, such as removing a splinter from a child's finger and applying a bandage, to more complex situations, like managing multiple injuries at a car accident scene until professional medical help arrives. Regardless of the complexity, the goals of first aid remain consistent. First aid aims to:

- Preserve life;
- Prevent the injury or illness from worsening;
- Promote recovery.

First aid encompasses both knowledge and practical skills. This lesson provides some of the essential knowledge, but the most effective way to learn first aid skills is by enrolling in a certified first aid course with a qualified instructor. In an emergency involving injuries, your ability to remain calm, assess the situation accurately, and administer appropriate first aid will rely heavily on your training and skills in first aid.

Who is a First-Aider?

A first-aider can be anyone who steps in to provide immediate assistance during an emergency. Often, a first-aider is a passerby who decides to help. For example, a parent might act as a first-aider for their child, a firefighter could assist an injured pedestrian, or an employee might be trained to handle emergencies at their workplace. A first-aider is someone who takes control of the situation and provides first aid.

First-aiders do not diagnose or treat injuries and illnesses, except for very minor cases. Instead, they identify suspected injuries and illnesses and administer first aid accordingly.

What Can a First-Aider Do?

A first-aider's role goes beyond just administering first aid. In an emergency, where confusion and fear are prevalent, a calm and effective first-aider can provide reassurance and help reduce the trauma of the experience. Besides providing first aid, a first-aider can also:

- Protect the belongings of the casualties;
- Keep unnecessary people away from the scene;
- Reassure the casualty's family or friends;

- Clean up the emergency scene and address any unsafe conditions that may have led to the injuries.

A Casualty's Age in First Aid and CPR

In the context of first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), the age of the casualty is categorized as follows:

- An infant casualty is under one year old.
- A child casualty is between one and eight years old.
- An adult casualty is eight years and older.

These age categories are guidelines, and the casualty's size should also be taken into account when determining the appropriate first aid and CPR techniques.

First Aid and the Law

Can a first-aider be sued for providing first aid? The fear of legal repercussions is one of the main reasons people hesitate to help in emergencies. As a first-aider, there are two primary "legal" contexts in which you might provide first aid:

1. **As part of your job:** For example, you might be a lifeguard or security guard with responsibilities that include giving first aid.
2. **As a bystander:** You might be a passerby who witnesses an emergency and chooses to assist the injured or ill person.

Understanding the legal implications of providing first aid can alleviate fears and encourage more people to help when it's needed most.

Giving First Aid as Part of Your Job

When providing first aid as part of your job, you have a legal duty to respond to emergencies at your workplace. This duty requires you to use reasonable skill and care, appropriate to your level of training. Your responsibilities might extend beyond basic first aid and could include tasks such as performing rescues or driving an emergency vehicle.

If you are a designated first-aider at work, it is crucial to ensure that your certification is always current. Additionally, seeking training beyond the minimum required level can make you a more confident and effective first-aider.

Giving First Aid as a Passerby

In Canada (except Quebec) and most of the United States, there is no legal duty to assist someone in need; if you choose not to help an injured person, you are not legally at fault.

However, governments encourage people to help others by recognizing Good Samaritan principles. These principles offer legal protection to individuals who decide to provide assistance in an emergency.

Once you choose to give aid, you are obligated to use reasonable skill and care according to your level of training. This ensures that your efforts are both responsible and effective, offering protection to both you and the person in need.

Principles of the Good Samaritan

You are considered a Good Samaritan when you help someone in need without having a legal obligation to do so. As a Good Samaritan, you provide assistance without expecting payment and with good intentions, motivated by care and concern for others. When assisting in an emergency, you should adhere to the following principles:

- Identify yourself as a first-aider and obtain permission to help the injured or ill person before offering assistance. This is known as consent.
- Use reasonable skill and care based on your level of knowledge and training.
- Avoid negligence in your actions.
- Do not abandon the person once you have begun providing assistance.

Consent

The law upholds everyone's right to personal autonomy, meaning they have the right not to be touched without their permission. As a first-aider, it is crucial to respect this right. Always introduce yourself to the casualty and ask for their permission before offering assistance. Upon arriving at an emergency scene, identify yourself as a first-aider and specify if you hold any other relevant roles, such as a police officer or nurse.

Steps to Obtain Consent

1. **Identify Yourself:** Clearly state who you are and your role (e.g., first-aider, nurse, police officer).
2. **Ask for Permission:** Request the casualty's consent to provide help. If they agree, you have explicit consent to proceed.

Implied Consent and Special Situations

- **Implied Consent:** If the casualty is unable to respond but does not object to your assistance, you have implied consent to help.
- **Unresponsive Casualty:** If the casualty is unresponsive and there are relatives present, seek consent from the spouse or another immediate family member. Even though it may seem unnecessary to ask an unresponsive person for consent, it is a legal requirement. If there is no response, you have implied consent to proceed with first aid.

- **Young Children and Infants:** Obtain consent from a parent or legal guardian. If no guardian is present, the law assumes implied consent, allowing you to assist.
- **Refusal of Consent:** Respect a conscious casualty's right to refuse assistance. Do not force first aid upon them. Even without consent, you can still manage the scene and call for medical help.

By following these principles, you ensure that your actions are legally compliant and respectful of the casualty's rights.

Reasonable Skill and Care

As a Good Samaritan, you are expected to use reasonable skill and care when providing first aid, in accordance with your level of knowledge and skills. Your actions will be evaluated based on what a reasonable person with the same level of training would do in a similar situation. It is essential to administer first aid cautiously to avoid worsening the injury. Ensure that you only perform actions within your competence and that every step you take benefits the casualty in some way.

Negligence

The Good Samaritan principles protect you from being deemed negligent when providing emergency medical care, as long as you use reasonable skill and care according to your training level. When administering first aid, use common sense and ensure that your actions are in the casualty's best interest. In essence, provide the type of care you would hope to receive if you were in the casualty's position.

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Abandonment

Never abandon a casualty once you have started providing care. After the casualty has accepted your offer of help, you must stay with them until one of the following occurs:

- They are handed over to medical professionals.
- They are handed over to another first-aider.
- They no longer need or want your assistance, typically because the situation is no longer an emergency.

Safety and First Aid

The primary rule in giving first aid is to "give first aid safely." Emergency scenes can be hazardous, and it is crucial to ensure that your actions do not put you or others in danger. Always take time to identify hazards and assess the risks associated with any actions you plan to take. Avoid becoming a casualty yourself.

Three Basic Risks to Be Aware Of

1. **Energy Source of the Original Injury:** Determine if the source of the initial injury is still active and posing a risk. For instance, if a machine caused the injury, is the machine still operational?
2. **Secondary or External Hazards:** Identify other potential hazards present at the scene. For example, at a car accident scene, there might be a risk of explosion or further injuries from passing vehicles.
3. **Risks from Rescue or First Aid Procedures:** Consider the potential risks associated with rescue and first aid actions. For example, if the casualty is significantly larger than you, assess whether you can move them without injuring yourself.

By being aware of these risks and taking appropriate precautions, you can ensure that you provide effective and safe first aid.

Preventing Infection

When providing first aid, close contact between the first-aider and the casualty can increase the risk of infection transmission. This risk is particularly high when blood and other bodily fluids are involved, as they can carry viruses like HIV and hepatitis B. Since you may not know if a casualty is infected, always use safety measures known as universal precautions to minimize the risk.

Universal Precautions

Universal precautions are practices used in healthcare to reduce infection risk for both the caregiver and the casualty. For first-aiders, these precautions include:

- Hand washing
- Wearing gloves
- Minimizing mouth-to-mouth contact during artificial respiration
- Careful handling of sharp objects

Gloves

Gloves act as a barrier to prevent direct hand contact with blood, bodily fluids, tissue, or anything contaminated. Always wear gloves when there's a chance of touching these substances. Put on gloves as you approach an emergency scene. Both vinyl and latex gloves are effective, although latex can cause skin irritation in some people. Store gloves in an accessible place, avoiding extreme temperatures, and keep a few pairs in your first aid kit.

Hand Washing

Hand contact is a primary way infections spread. Wash your hands with soap and running water immediately after any contact with a casualty. It's also wise to wash your hands frequently when around people who are sick, such as those with colds or the flu. Regular hand washing is a key preventive measure to reduce the transmission of infections.

Minimizing Mouth-to-Mouth Contact

There is a minor risk of infection transmission during artificial respiration (AR). To mitigate this risk, use a face mask or shield specifically designed to prevent disease transmission during AR. Many types and brands are available, and it's best to choose a disposable mask or one with a disposable one-way valve. Keep the mask in an easily accessible place for quick use, and always follow the provided instructions for proper application.

Handling Sharp Objects

If a sharp object contaminated with infected blood pricks or cuts you, it could lead to infection. While first-aiders typically do not use sharp objects like scalpels and needles, situations may arise where a knife is needed, or broken glass contaminated with blood must be cleaned up. In such cases, wear gloves and handle sharp objects with extreme caution, as they can cut through gloves and skin, leading to infection.

Safety Measures: Universal Precautions

Universal precautions are essential for protecting both the first-aider and the casualty. While it might seem like valuable time is being wasted by putting on gloves or preparing a face mask, these precautions are critical for safety. Use universal precautions to ensure the safety of everyone at the emergency scene.

Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse

When providing first aid to a child with injuries, be vigilant for signs of child abuse. Child abuse encompasses any form of physical harm, emotional deprivation, neglect, or sexual maltreatment that can cause injury or psychological damage. Look for signs such as:

- Injuries inconsistent with the child's account or abilities.
- Unusually shaped bruises or burns.
- The child's apparent fear of the parent or caregiver.

If you suspect child abuse, avoid making accusations. Insist that the child receive medical help for the injuries, allowing for a full medical assessment. If you believe the child will not be taken to a doctor, call an ambulance and the police to the scene to ensure the child receives medical attention.

If medical care for the child is refused and calling for an ambulance or the police is impossible, contact a child welfare agency to report your suspicions. You can choose to remain anonymous when making such a report if you prefer.

Medical Help

As a first-aider, you are not qualified to diagnose the exact nature or extent of any injury or illness; only a medical doctor has the professional experience and legal authority to do so. It is generally advisable for first-aiders to suggest that the casualty receives medical care following first aid treatment, except in cases of the most minor injuries. In the context of first aid, medical care is referred to as medical help.

Safety and the Role of a Security Guard

A security guard may play a significant role in maintaining safety and responding to emergencies. To effectively contribute to safety, a security guard must understand:

- Why an accident has happened.
- What injuries have resulted from the accident.
- How similar accidents and injuries can be prevented.

To develop safety-oriented skills for accident prevention, a security guard should:

- Make a personal commitment to safety.
- Follow safety rules as outlined in the Site Orders.
- Adopt safety practices.
- Use protective clothing and equipment.
- Learn the safe operation of machinery and equipment.
- Recognize and heed the symbols on hazardous products.

- Take precautions recommended on the labels of hazardous products.

Importance of First Aid Services in the Workplace

Federal and provincial acts regulating occupational health and safety are among the many reasons for establishing first aid services in the workplace. These regulations specify management responsibilities for maintaining acceptable levels of first aid training for each industrial and business operation. Besides meeting legal requirements, effective first aid services offer valuable benefits, such as:

- A decrease in personal injuries.
- Improved morale.
- Reduced absenteeism.
- Enhanced productivity.

The saying “once bitten, twice shy” is particularly relevant to personal injuries. An injured person often becomes more aware of hazards and more safety-conscious. However, similar changes in attitudes can be observed in workers who have received safety-oriented first aid training, without experiencing the pain and suffering of an injury. First aid training not only reduces the number of injury incidents but also decreases the severity of injuries that do occur. First aid services are a crucial component of the emergency response system required for any organization, institution, or industry.

Safety in a Violent Situation

Violent situations can occur unexpectedly, and it is crucial to remain vigilant for any signs of violence at an emergency scene. If there is violence or the potential for it, prioritize your own safety above all else—never put yourself at risk.

Handling Violent Situations

When faced with violence, the initial instinct may be to react physically. However, it is essential not to engage in a physical confrontation. The primary goal is to ensure the safety of everyone on site. Physical force should only be used to defend against an imminent threat to your life or that of another person. To achieve the best possible outcome, call the police as soon as possible. Do not assume others will do this, as many people may be too focused on the incident to make the call. Only intervene once you are certain the police are on their way, and only if absolutely necessary.

Dealing with Violent Injuries

Injuries resulting from violence often indicate a crime has been committed. If you suspect a crime, call the police to the scene. While waiting for their arrival, take the following steps:

- **Protect Safety:** Ensure your own safety and that of others if possible.
- **Provide First Aid:** Administer first aid for any injuries and be mindful of the casualty's emotional state, referring to psychological first aid for assault victims.
- **Maintain Privacy:** Keep onlookers away to ensure the casualty's privacy.
- **Preserve Evidence:** Leave everything at the scene untouched to avoid disturbing evidence that could assist the police.

Role of a Security Guard

As a security guard, you may possess additional information valuable to the police. Remain at the scene until the police allow you to leave and answer all their questions thoroughly. Your cooperation and detailed information can be crucial in resolving the situation and ensuring justice.