

# Background Information

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## ► Why Is First Aid Important?

It is better to know first aid and not need it than to need it and not know it. Everyone should be able to perform first aid, because most people will eventually find themselves in a situation requiring it for another person or for themselves. First aiders do not diagnose (this is what medical doctors do), but they can suspect what the problem is and then give first aid.

## ► Who Needs First Aid?

Although heart disease and cancer continue to be critical health problems in the United States, injuries—both unintentional and intentional—constitute a major threat to public health. This threat has been called the neglected epidemic.

Death statistics do not always reflect the extent or severity of the injury problem. Most people who are injured do not die of their injuries. The scope of injuries can best be appreciated if thought of as a pyramid. Deaths from injuries and hospital discharges, traditionally where the most available data have been, are only the tip of the problem. There are a far greater number of injuries seen in emergency departments, clinics, and physician offices. An even greater number of injuries are treated by first aiders. This supports the need for first aid training **Table 1**.

Each year, one in four people experience a nonfatal injury serious enough to need medical care or to restrict activity for at least 1 day.

## chapter *at a glance*

- Why Is First Aid Important?
- Who Needs First Aid?
- What Is First Aid?
- First Aid Supplies
- First Aid and the Law

More sports-related nonfatal injuries are treated in hospital emergency departments than any other type of unintentional injury.

## FYI

### OSHA Regulations

(Standards-29CFR 1910.151) Medical Services and First Aid—General Industry:

"In the absence of infirmary, clinic, or hospital in near proximity to workplace which is used for the treatment of all injured employees, a person or persons shall be adequately trained to render first aid. Adequate first aid supplies shall be readily available."

A delay of as little as 4 minutes when a person's heart stops can mean death. Therefore, what a bystander does can mean the difference between life and death. Fortunately, most injuries do not require lifesaving efforts. During their entire lifetimes, most people will see only one or two situations involving life-threatening conditions. Most injuries do not require lifesaving efforts **Figure 1**. Knowing what to do for less severe injuries demands greater attention during first aid instruction.

Each year, the injuries of millions of Americans go unreported. For many of them, the injury causes temporary pain and inconvenience; for others, however, the injury leads to disability, chronic pain, and a profound change in lifestyle. Given the size of the injury and sudden illness problem, everyone should be prepared to deal with an emergency.

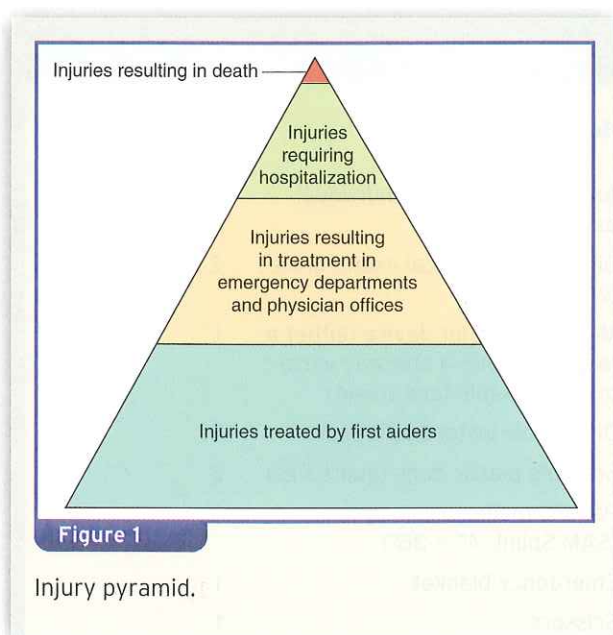
**Table 1** 10 Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, United States – 2007

Rank	Age Groups										Total
	<1	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
1	Congenital Anomalies 5,785	Unintentional Injury 1,588	Unintentional Injury 965	Unintentional Injury 1,229	Unintentional Injury 15,897	Unintentional Injury 14,977	Unintentional Injury 16,931	Malignant Neoplasms 50,167	Malignant Neoplasms 103,171	Heart Disease 496,095	Heart Disease 616,067
2	Short Gestation 4,857	Congenital Anomalies 546	Malignant Neoplasms 480	Malignant Neoplasms 479	Homicide 5,551	Suicide 5,278	Malignant Neoplasms 13,288	Heart Disease 37,434	Heart Disease 65,527	Malignant Neoplasms 389,730	Malignant Neoplasms 562,875
3	Sudden Infant Death Syndrome 2,453	Homicide 398	Congenital Anomalies 196	Homicide 213	Suicide 4,140	Homicide 4,758	Heart Disease 11,839	Unintentional Injury 20,319	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 12,777	Cerebrovascular 115,961	Cerebrovascular 135,952
4	Maternal Pregnancy Complications 1,769	Malignant Neoplasms 364	Homicide 133	Suicide 180	Malignant Neoplasms 1,653	Malignant Neoplasms 3,463	Suicide 6,722	Liver Disease 8,212	Unintentional Injury 12,193	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 109,562	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 127,924
5	Unintentional Injury 1,285	Heart Disease 173	Heart Disease 110	Congenital Anomalies 178	Heart Disease 1,084	Heart Disease 3,223	Human Immunodeficiency Virus 3,572	Suicide 7,778	Diabetes Mellitus 11,304	Alzheimer's Disease 73,797	Unintentional Injury 123,706
6	Placenta Cord Membranes 1,135	Influenza & Pneumonia 109	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 54	Heart Disease 131	Congenital Anomalies 402	HIV 1,091	Homicide 3,052	Cerebrovascular 6,385	Cerebrovascular 10,500	Diabetes Mellitus 51,528	Alzheimer's Disease 74,632
7	Bacterial Sepsis 820	Septicemia 78	Influenza & Pneumonia 48	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 64	Cerebrovascular 195	Diabetes Mellitus 610	Liver Disease 2,570	Diabetes Mellitus 5,753	Liver Disease 8,004	Influenza & Pneumonia 45,941	Diabetes Mellitus 71,382
8	Respiratory Distress 789	Perinatal Period 70	Benign Neoplasms 41	Influenza & Pneumonia 55	Diabetes Mellitus 168	Cerebrovascular 505	Cerebrovascular 2,133	HIV 4,156	Suicide 5,069	Nephritis 38,484	Influenza & Pneumonia 52,717
9	Circulatory System Disease 624	Benign Neoplasms 59	Cerebrovascular 38	Cerebrovascular 45	Influenza & Pneumonia 163	Congenital Anomalies 417	Diabetes Mellitus 1,984	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 4,153	Nephritis 4,440	Unintentional Injury 38,292	Nephritis 46,448
10	Neonatal Hemorrhage 597	Chronic Low Respiratory Disease 57	Septicemia 36	Benign Neoplasms 43	Three Tied* 160	Liver Disease 384	Septicemia 910	Viral Hepatitis 2,815	Septicemia 4,231	Septicemia 26,362	Septicemia 34,828

\*The three causes are: Complicated Pregnancy, HIV, Septicemia

Source: National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC.

Produced by: Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC.



## ► What Is First Aid?

**First aid** is the immediate care given to an injured or suddenly ill person. First aid does not take the place of proper medical care. It consists only of giving temporary help until proper medical care, if needed, is obtained or until the chance for recovery without medical care is ensured. Most injuries and illnesses do not require medical care.

Properly applied, first aid might mean the difference between life and death, between rapid recovery and a long hospitalization, or between a temporary and a permanent disability. First aid involves more than doing things for others; it also includes treatments that people can give themselves.

Recognizing a serious medical emergency and knowing how to get help could be crucial in saving a life. Recognition of an emergency can be delayed because neither the victim nor bystanders know basic symptoms (for example, a heart attack victim might wait hours after the onset of symptoms before seeking help). Moreover, too many people do not know first aid; even if they do, they might panic in an emergency.

## ► First Aid Supplies

The supplies in a first aid kit should be customized to include those items likely to be used on a regular basis. A kit for the home is often different than one for the

## Q&A

### What level of care is a first aider expected to give?

The level of care is also known by the term “standard of care.” A first aider cannot provide the same level of care as a physician or an emergency medical technician. To meet the standard of care for a victim, a first aider must: (1) do what is expected of someone with first aid training and experience working under similar conditions, and (2) treat the victim to the best of his or her ability. If the first aid you provide is not up to the expected standard, you may be held liable for your actions.

workplace. A home kit may contain personal medications and a smaller number of items. A workplace kit will need more items (such as bandages) and will not include personal medications. **Table 2** lists the basic items that should be stocked in a workplace first aid kit.

Although a first aid kit may have some medications, such as antihistamines and topical ointments, there might be local requirements that restrict the use of these items by first aiders without prior written approval. For example, teachers, activity leaders, and bus drivers in certain areas might not be able to administer these items to children without specific written permission signed by a child’s parent or guardian.

## ► First Aid and the Law

Legal and ethical issues concern all first aiders. For example, is a first aider required to stop and give care at an automobile crash? Can a child with a broken arm be treated even when the parents cannot be contacted for their consent? These and many other legal and ethical questions confront first aiders.

A first aider can be sued. Do not become overly concerned about being sued—it rarely happens. Ways to minimize the risk of a suit include:

- Obtaining the victim’s consent before touching him or her.
- Following this book’s guidelines and not exceeding your training level.
- Explaining any first aid you are about to give.
- Once starting to care for a victim, stay with that person. You are legally bound to remain with the victim until care is turned over to an equally or better trained person.

**Table 2** Sample First Aid Kit

Items	Minimum Quantity	Items	Minimum Quantity
Adhesive strip bandages (1" × 3")*	20	Antibiotic ointment, individual packets*	6 packets
Triangular bandages* (muslin, 36"-40" × 36"-40" × 52"-56")	4	Disposable (medical exam) gloves (various sizes)*	2 pairs per size
Sterile eye pads (2" × 2")	2	Mouth-to-barrier device (either a face mask with a one-way valve or a disposable face shield)	1
Sterile gauze pads (4" × 4")	6	Disposable instant cold packs	2
Sterile gauze pads (3" × 3")*	6	Sealable plastic bags (quart size)	2
Sterile gauze pads (2" × 2")*	6	Padded malleable splint (SAM Splint, 4" × 36")	1
Sterile nonstick pads (3" × 4")*	6	Emergency blanket	1
Sterile trauma pads (5" × 9")*	2	Scissors	1
Sterile trauma pads (8" × 10")	1	Tweezers	1
Sterile conforming roller gauze (2" width)	3 rolls	Hand sanitizer (61% ethyl alcohol)	1 bottle
Sterile conforming roller gauze (4.5" width)	3 rolls	Biohazard waste bag (3.5 gallon capacity)	2
Waterproof tape (1" × 5 yards)	1 roll	Mini flashlight and batteries	1
Porous adhesive tape (2" × 5 yd)*	1 roll	List of local emergency telephone numbers	1
Elastic roller bandages (4" and 6")	1 of each	First aid guide*	1
Antiseptic skin wipes, individually wrapped*	10 packets		

\*Item meets the ANSI/ISEA Z308.1-2009 minimum standard for the workplace first aid kit. Optional items and sizes may be added based on the potential hazards.

## Consent

A first aider must have the victim's **consent** (permission) before giving first aid. Touching another person without his or her consent is unlawful (known as **battery**) and could be grounds for a lawsuit. Likewise, giving first aid without the victim's consent is unlawful.

### Expressed Consent

Consent must be obtained from every alert, mentally competent (able to make a rational decision) person of legal age. Tell the victim that you have first aid training and explain what you will be doing. The victim may give permission verbally or with a nod of the head, which would indicate **expressed consent**.

## Implied Consent

Implied consent involves an unresponsive victim with a life-threatening condition. It is assumed or implied that an unresponsive victim would consent to lifesaving interventions. An alert victim who does not resist the administrations of a first aider is also assumed to have given **implied consent**.

### Children and Mentally Incompetent Adults

Consent must be obtained from the parent or guardian of a child victim, as legally defined by the state. The same is true for an adult who is mentally incompetent. When life-threatening situations exist and a parent or legal guardian is not available for consent, first aid

should be given based on implied consent. Do not withhold first aid from a minor just to obtain consent from a parent or guardian.

Psychiatric emergencies present difficult problems of consent. Under most conditions, a police officer is the only person with the authority to restrain and transport a person against that person's will. A first aider should not intervene unless directed to do so by a police officer or unless it is obvious that the victim is about to do life-threatening harm to himself or herself or to others.

## Refusing Help

Although it seldom happens, a person might refuse assistance for countless reasons, such as religious grounds, avoidance of possible pain, or the desire to be examined by a physician rather than by a first aider. Whatever the reason for refusing medical care, or even if no reason is given, the alert and mentally competent adult can reject help.

Generally, the wisest approach is for you to inform the victim of his or her medical condition, what you propose to do, and why the help is necessary. If the victim understands the consequences and still refuses treatment, there is little else you can do. Call 9-1-1 and, while awaiting arrival:

- Try again to persuade the victim to accept care and encourage others at the scene to persuade the victim. A victim could change his or her mind after a short time.
- Make certain you have witnesses. A victim could refuse consent and then deny having done so.
- Consider calling for law enforcement assistance. In most locations, the police can place a person in protective custody and require him or her to go to a hospital.

## Abandonment

**Abandonment** means leaving a victim after starting to give help without first ensuring that the victim will receive continued care at the same level or higher. Once you have responded to an emergency, you must not leave a victim who needs continuing first aid until another competent and trained person takes responsibility for the victim. This might seem obvious, but there have been cases in which critically ill or injured victims were left unattended and then died. Thus, a first aider must stay with the victim until another equally or better trained person takes over.

## Q&A

### How can I avoid a lawsuit resulting from giving first aid?

Before giving first aid, get the victim's consent or permission. Then provide good care, keep within your training level, be nice to the victim, have witnesses, and afterward, write down what you did, names of witnesses, and who took over the victim's care from you.

## Negligence

**Negligence** means not following the accepted standards of care, resulting in further injury to the victim. Negligence involves:

1. Having a duty to act (required to give first aid)
2. Breaching that duty (either by giving no care or by giving substandard care)
3. Causing injury and damages
4. Exceeding your level of training

## Duty to Act

No one is required to give first aid unless a legal **duty to act** exists. For example, you do not have to help a stranger unless you have a legal obligation to that person, or you were involved in the events that led to the victim's injuries, regardless of who was at fault. The decision to help in an emergency is usually an ethical (moral) one. Duty to act could apply in the following situations:

- When employment requires it. If your employer designates you as the person responsible for providing first aid to meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration (also known as OSHA) requirements and you are called to an injury scene, you have a duty to act. Examples of occupations that involve a legal obligation to give first aid include law enforcement officers, park rangers, athletic trainers, lifeguards, flight attendants, and fire fighters.
- When on duty (and sometimes when off duty). Some states require certain people who are licensed by the state to give emergency care regardless of their on- or off-duty status. In other words, these people are considered to be always on duty. Other states require them to act when on duty but not generally

when they are off duty, unless they are in uniform or have other visible insignia and appear to be on duty—in which case these people must respond.

- When a preexisting responsibility exists. You might have a preexisting relationship with other persons that makes you responsible for them, which means that you must give first aid should they need it. For example, a parent has a preexisting responsibility for a child, and a driver for a passenger.

### Breach of Duty

A **breach of duty** happens when a first aider fails to provide the type of care that would be given by a person having the same or similar training. There are two ways to breach one's duty: acts of omission and acts of commission. An **act of omission** is the failure to do what a reasonably prudent person with the same or similar training would do in the same or similar circumstances. An **act of commission** is doing something that a reasonably prudent person would not do under the same or similar circumstances. Forgetting to put on a dressing is an act of omission; cutting a snake-bite site is an act of commission.

### Injury and Damages Inflicted

In addition to physical damage, injury and damage can include physical pain and suffering, mental anguish, medical expenses, and sometimes loss of earnings and earning capacity.

### Confidentiality

First aiders might learn confidential information. It is important that you be extremely cautious about revealing information you learn while caring for someone.

The law recognizes that people have the right to privacy. Do not discuss what you know with anyone other than those who have a medical need to know. The exception to this is when state laws require the reporting of certain incidents, such as rape, abuse, and gunshot wounds.

### Good Samaritan Laws

**Good Samaritan laws** encourage people to assist others in distress by granting them immunity against lawsuits. Although the laws vary from state to state, Good Samaritan immunity generally applies only when the rescuer is (1) acting during an emergency; (2) acting in good faith, which means he or she has good intentions; (3) acting without compensation; and (4) not guilty of malicious misconduct or gross negligence toward the victim (deviating from rational first aid guidelines).

Although Good Samaritan laws primarily cover health care providers, many states have expanded them to include laypersons serving as first aiders. In fact, some states have several Good Samaritan laws that cover different types of people in various situations. Many legal experts believe Good Samaritan laws have given first aiders a false sense of security. These laws will not protect first aiders who have caused further injury to a victim. Good Samaritan laws are not a protection for poorly given first aid or for exceeding the scope of your training. Fear of lawsuits has made some people hesitant of becoming involved in emergency situations. First aiders, however, are rarely sued.

# prep kit

## ► Ready for Review

- Everyone should be able to perform first aid because most people will eventually find themselves in a situation requiring it for another person or for themselves.
- First aid is the immediate care given to an injured or suddenly ill person. First aid does not take the place of proper medical care.
- The supplies in a first aid kit should be customized to include those items likely to be used on a regular basis.
- Legal and ethical issues concern all first aiders.
- A first aider must have the victim's consent (permission) before giving first aid.
- First aiders might learn confidential information. It is important that you be extremely cautious about revealing information you learn while caring for someone.
- Varying from state to state, Good Samaritan laws encourage people to assist others in distress by granting them immunity against lawsuits.

## ► Vital Vocabulary

**abandonment** Failure to continue first aid until relieved by someone with the same or a higher level of training.

**act of commission** Doing something that a reasonably prudent person would not do under the same or similar circumstances.

**act of omission** Failure to do what a reasonably prudent person with the same or similar training would do in the same or similar circumstances.

**battery** Touching a person or providing first aid without consent.

**breach of duty** When a first aider fails to provide the type of care that would be given by a person having the same or similar training.

**consent** An agreement by a patient or victim to accept treatment offered as explained by medical personnel or first aiders.

**duty to act** A person's responsibility to provide victim care.

**expressed consent** Permission for care that a victim gives verbally or with a head nod.

**first aid** Immediate care given to an injured or suddenly ill person.

**Good Samaritan laws** Laws that encourage people to voluntarily help an injured or suddenly ill person by minimizing the liability for errors made while rendering emergency care in good faith.

**implied consent** An assumed consent given by an unconscious adult when emergency lifesaving treatment is required.

**negligence** Deviation from the accepted standard of care that results in further injury to the victim.

# prep kit

## ► Assessment in Action

Toward the end of the ski season you hear that a ski resort in a neighboring state is almost vacant of skiers, and the resort is offering reduced fees during weekdays. You decide to take advantage of reduced ski fees and take a few days off to go skiing. As you ski down the mountain on a run with trees bordering on both sides, you come across a man lying motionless in the snow near a tree he may have crashed into. No other skiers are in sight and you are alone. As you approach the victim, you see no obvious injuries. You have no first aid supplies. Your first aid certification is still current.

**Directions:** Circle Yes if you agree with the statement; circle No if you disagree.

- Yes No 1. You have to stop to help the man.
- Yes No 2. You have implied consent to help this man.
- Yes No 3. After tapping on the man's shoulder to see if he is OK, he remains unresponsive but breathing. You can leave and assume that the ski patrol will be coming shortly.
- Yes No 4. You decide to help. Before assessing the victim, you roll him over, causing him to slide down the hill and hit a tree. Good Samaritan laws protect you even if you cause further harm to the victim.

## ► Check Your Knowledge

**Directions:** Circle Yes if you agree with the statement; circle No if you disagree.

- Yes No 1. Because an ambulance can arrive within minutes in most locations, most people do not need to learn first aid.
- Yes No 2. Correct first aid can mean the difference between life and death.
- Yes No 3. During your lifetime, you are likely to encounter many life-threatening emergencies.
- Yes No 4. All injured victims need medical care.
- Yes No 5. Before giving first aid to an alert, competent adult, you must get consent (permission) from the victim.
- Yes No 6. If you ask an injured adult if you can help, and she says "No," you can ignore her and proceed to provide care.
- Yes No 7. People who are designated as first aiders by their employers must give first aid to injured employees while on the job.
- Yes No 8. First aiders who help injured victims are rarely sued.
- Yes No 9. Good Samaritan laws provide a degree of protection for first aiders who act in good faith and without compensation.
- Yes No 10. You are required to provide first aid to any injured or suddenly ill person you encounter.