



First Aid

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Introduction

One of the most important factors in treating on-the-job injuries are those initial steps taken in treating an injury before any further care is necessary. The following information will assist you in determining what needs to be done in the initial stages of an on-the-job injury. It includes relatively simple measures that can be taken before the injured person is attended to by a professional. Of course, not all injuries can or should be handled on the job site. It is important to note that all employers should have a plan to deal with a medical emergency.

First aid tips

Cuts - With cuts, the first thing to do is to stop any bleeding. All you need to do is to apply pressure. You can do this by holding your hands or fingertips against the cut until the bleeding stops. Next, you need to clean out the wound. What you're trying to do is irrigate the wound. By doing this, you're doing more than killing bacteria, you're cleaning all the dirt and grit out of the wound. A good stream of water and soap will be adequate. There are many antibiotic ointments and antiseptics on the market. Antiseptics are useful in further cleaning the wound and preventing infection. If these are not available, ethyl alcohol or isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol will do.

Hydrogen peroxide is the most widely used antiseptic. However, it is effective only when it comes into contact with blood and tissue fluids; the fizzing effect is what cleans and acts to prevent infection. Allow the peroxide to dry before applying a bandage. The type of bandage used depends on the type of cut. A plain adhesive bandage will do the trick. Do not touch the part of

the bandage that covers the cut. Keep in mind that the purpose of the bandage is to protect a wound, not seal it. A loose covering allows air to reach the wound, which promotes healing.

Deep cuts - For deep cuts that may require stitches, a butterfly bandage can temporarily bring the skin back together. After cleaning the wound, thoroughly dry the skin surface before applying a butterfly bandage. Pull the skin tightly together, apply one butterfly wing, pull the bandage tight, and secure the other wing to the skin. You can protect the cut by putting a gauze pad over it or by wrapping gauze over the injury before going to the emergency room.

Punctures - A key danger of a puncture wound is deep tissue damage. This is why the wound should be irrigated thoroughly. Small punctures caused by relatively sharp and clean instruments (not dirty or rusted) can be fairly easily treated. However, anything like a nail wound should be treated by a doctor or nurse because of the possibility of deep tissue damage.

Blisters - Treatment depends mainly on the size, location, and whether it has burst. A common rule is don't burst it if it is smaller than a nickel - that opens the skin to infection. Cover small blisters with a bandage. The liquid will reabsorb on its own. If the blistered skin breaks anyway, clear the area carefully, remove the dead skin and cover the area with antibiotic spray or ointment. A large blister will usually burst on its own, so to minimize the chance of infection, it's considered best to use a sterile sharp instrument (a needle or knife) to burst it. The dead skin can be removed and the area covered with antibiotic ointment and a bandage.

Burns - Another area where new information has prompted changes in first aid treatment is burns. In the past, we were told to put water on first- and second-degree burns but not on third-degree burns where the skin is charred. Now, with heat burns, water is recommended for all degrees - from minor to severe - in order to stop the burning process. However, water should not be applied to electrical burns. Nor is ice recommended for burns - just cold water. Once the pain has subsided, a dry dressing should be placed over the burn. Ointment should not be placed on severe burns but may be used on minor burns.

When to seek help

Though many cuts can be treated at home or on the job, some may require a visit to a doctor or local emergency room. Emergency treatment or a physician's care should be sought in the following circumstances: when there is loss of function - for example, when one can't extend or bend the body part which is injured; when the bleeding from the cut area does not stop; when the cut is completely through the skin so you can see into it - for

example, when you can see muscle, fat, or tendons, you know the skin is completely cut.

Training programs

First Aid Safety - manual

American Red Cross - **First Aid Techniques and Safety Training in the Workplace.**

National Safety Council (NSC) - **First Aid and CPR for General Training.** A 96-page color text providing the basics of first aid and CPR. Product #19505-0000.

NSC - **First Aid and CPR for Professional Training.** Full-color text providing information on advanced first aid and CPR training. Product #19506-0000.

NSC- **First Aid Only!** Product #19502-0000.

American Heart Association. **First Aid and CPR Training Course for Work and Home.**

Related articles and information

The American Red Cross Ask for information on their new **Check, Care, Call** system.

Purdy, Candy. "What's new in first aid?" *Current Health* 2. Oct. 1994.

Munson, Marty. "Minimal care is best." *Prevention*. Sept. 1995, Vol. 47.

Purdy, Candy. "Electrical burns - a charge you'll want to avoid." *Current Health* 2. Nov. 1993, vol. 20.

Uzzle, Burke. "Bandage wrap-up." *Prevention*. June 1994.