



by Karen Stephens

Prepare for Emergencies With Planning and First Aid Skills

In days of old, contagious disease posed the greatest threat for childhood death; but today, the leading cause of death among children is injury. Most of those injuries are preventable. What a sobering fact. Of course, there are fluke injuries that could never be anticipated or prevented, but they are few and far between. For the rest, anticipation and prevention can greatly reduce injury statistics for children.

The most common childhood injuries stem from car wrecks, pedestrian accidents, bicycle mishaps, drowning, burns, and firearm accidents. And there are plenty of other risks. Poisoning, 90% of which occurs in the home, also casts a shadow on children's safety. Natural disasters, ranging from storms to earthquakes, put kids in jeopardy, too.

Parents, and others who care for children, are on the front line of prevention and protection. That's why my job as child care director requires me (and our teaching staff) to know how to prevent accidents and follow emergency procedures. Specifically, we're required to maintain certification for delivering first aid and CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). I'll admit that I'm never eager when it's time to renew the certificate, but I'm always pleased once I've accomplished it. I feel more confident that I can help a child should emergency arise.

Like child care providers, parents should become adept at accident prevention and reacting to emergency. Prepare yourself now. Hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst. Following are concrete ways to prepare for home or auto emergency.

Emergency and Evacuations Plans

Let all family members (and babysitters) know where home, car, or recreation first aid kits are located and who is allowed to use them. This applies to emergency supplies, such as fire extinguishers, as well. Post emergency numbers (such as fire station) prominently by the phone and teach school-agers how to call them.

Establish evacuation procedures for emergencies and natural disasters. On a family calendar, put a monthly tickler note to remind you to practice the procedures.

Anticipate emergencies or natural disasters that are likely to occur and plan specific ways to respond. Emergencies may include: fire, electrical outages (including downed wires), lightning and wind storms, blizzards, ice storms, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, gas leaks, explosions, and so on.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

When extra help is needed to care for an illness, injury, or accident, contact the local Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Teach children how to do this as well. In most areas, EMS is reached by dialing 911. If you aren't served by 911, find an EMS number or dial 0 for help.

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EMS should absolutely be contacted when someone (child or adult) is unconscious or becoming unconscious (fainting or knocked out); is having trouble breathing or is breathing in an unusual or strange way; is bleeding severely; is having a seizure, severe headache, or slurred speech; shows signs of poisoning; has a broken bone(s) or head, neck, or back injury; is feeling pressure or pain in the abdomen that just won't go away; continuously vomits or passes blood; or is feeling chest pain or pressure.

Be prepared to give EMS personal information they need so they can help you, and teach children to do the same. Never hang up on an EMS dispatcher, let them hang up first. To help you effectively, EMS will need to know at least the following: exact address of emergency (or nearby landmark), telephone number of phone the caller is using, caller's name, what happened, number of people involved, condition of victim, and type of help victim is receiving (if any).

Poison Control Center

If you know or suspect that an injury is due to poisoning, contact your local Poison Control Center for help. The Center can also provide poison prevention tips, facts about poisons, emergency procedures, and treatment guidelines.

First Aid Kit

Keep a first aid kit wherever accidents or injuries may occur: home, car, recreation vehicle (like boat). A cell phone can be a lifesaver. First aid items can be found in the health care section of a discount store, pharmacy, or medical supply store.

Include the following in a homemade first aid kit: hand cleaner (pre-wrapped wet wipes are handy); scissors and tweezers; gauze pads, assorted sizes; roller gauze, assorted sizes; adhesive tape; antiseptic ointment; adhesive strips, assorted sizes; disposable latex gloves; small flashlight with extra batteries; cold pack; triangular bandage (up to three); compact solar blanket; syrup of ipecac and first aid charcoal granules (for poisonings).

Packaged First Aid Kits

To purchase pre-packaged first aid kits, ranging from a small personal kit, to family, or even sports safety kit, contact your local American Red Cross. Some pharmacy, discount, and outdoor sport stores sell them, too. You can also purchase first aid books; some are small enough to fit into an auto's glove compartment or your hiking backpack.

First Aid and CPR Training

There are a variety of resources for first aid and CPR training. You can locate short workshops through an agency or enroll in semester-long course work at a university or community college. Some companies offer employees first aid/CPR training through a Wellness Program. Cost for first aid/CPR training is very affordable. If you're ever called upon to use it with your child, it becomes more valuable than gold.

About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen has authored early care and education books and is a frequent contributor to *Exchange*.