



Common Emergencies



Affecting Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs

All children are at risk for medical emergencies. Children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN) are often more likely to experience a medical emergency because of their health status or disability. Emergencies that are common among children and youth with special health care needs include:

- Breathing problems with children dependent on oxygen
- Asthma attacks
- Swallowing and/or choking on an object
- A large loss of fluid (due to excess bleeding, dehydration, and/or diarrhea, vomiting, etc.)
- Head injuries (due to a blow to the head)
- Medication reactions or overdose
- Allergic reactions (due to foods, insect bites, or bee stings)
- Falls in which the child may need stitches
- High fevers and seizures
- Burns and cuts
- Problems related to the child's condition (respiratory, heart, physical, or other disease or disabilities)

No one wants to experience an emergency, but it's best to be prepared. The best way to prepare for an emergency is to plan ahead. For example:

- Learn basic first-aid. Learn how to respond to an emergency and provide treatment until help arrives.
- Learn how to call for help. In many communities, 9-1-1 is the number to call to speak with the police, fire and rescue, and emergency services. Find out if 9-1-1 is available in your community.
- Visit or talk with local emergency medical services (EMS) personnel BEFORE an emergency occurs. Learn about the services they provide. Educate providers about your child's special needs.
- Talk with your child's health care providers. Ask about special considerations for your child's health in case of an emergency.
- Visit local hospitals. Determine which hospital is best for your child. Discuss your choice with your child's health care provider.
- Make sure the child's school and child care center know how to manage your child in case of an emergency and which hospital your family prefers. Caregivers should have prior knowledge of the child's disability or health care need and his or her medications and dosages.
- Teach older CYSHCN how to explain his or her needs to EMS personnel when an adult is not available.

In an emergency it is important to remain calm and have vital information available about your child. The following information will help emergency service providers care for your child in an emergency.

- Child's age
- Diagnoses
- Important past medical history (such as surgery for a condition or injuries)
- Usual heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure (if known)
- Medications taken and medications to avoid
- Allergies
- Medical equipment used by the child (monitor, feeding tube, medication pump, ventilator, oxygen, etc)
- Name and contact information for the child's parent or guardian
- Health insurance information
- Child's method of communication
- Preferred hospital emergency department
- Name and contact information for the child's doctors and specialists

Consider storing this information on an Emergency Information Form available for download at: www.aap.org/advocacy/eif.doc. Keep a copy of the form at home in a safe but easy to reach place, such as on a refrigerator or near a telephone, and at your child's school or childcare center.

Other Resources. For more information about emergency care planning, visit: <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/emsc/ProductsAndResources.aspx> and choose the key word "Public Education – General".

