

First Aid & Anaphylaxis

First aid is the initial help or assistance of a sick or injured person given until full medical treatment is available. It is the care a person applies as soon as possible after an accident or sudden illness.

First aid skills are vital for all aspects of life, as injuries and illnesses occur in the home, during recreational activities and in the workplace. Not every incident requiring first aid is a critical, life-and-death situation. First aid knowledge is commonly used to manage minor injuries at home or work.

The main aims of first aid are to:

1. Preserve life – Including that of the casualty, bystanders and rescuer.
2. Protect the casualty and others from further harm – Particularly the unconscious casualty. Ensure the scene and surrounding area is safe.
3. Provide pain relief – Such as with ice packs or applying a sling.
4. Prevent the injury or illness from becoming worse - Ensure that the treatment you provide does not make the condition worse.
5. Provide reassurance

First aid has its limitations and does not take the place of professional medical treatment.

Consent

Prior to assisting any casualty, a First Aider must ask for and receive permission from the casualty before giving first aid. This can be a simple verbal ok from the casualty, or even just a nod of the head. First Aiders must remember that people have the right to refuse assistance. If the casualty is unconscious, then consent is implied. This means that the law assumes that the person would want their life to be saved at this point.

When the casualty is a minor, you should ask their parent or guardian. When their parent or guardian is not available, consent is likewise implied if unconscious

Duty of Care

Duty of care is a legal obligation requiring a person to act in a certain way. All First Aiders have a duty of care towards casualties to exercise reasonable care and skill in providing first aid treatment. This is because you will have the knowledge and skills required to manage an emergency situation.

If you choose to provide first aid assistance (which is voluntary under common law when this role does not form part of your employment / position requirements), you have a duty to use your knowledge and skills in a responsible way.

Under common law, First Aiders are not legally required to assist every casualty they may come across – assistance is voluntary. If the First Aider has agreed to take on a role through either employment or a community service, such as being employed as a first aid officer, then that person does have a duty of care to assist others in the context of their employment if necessary.

Although assistance is voluntary for First Aiders in the public, it is important to note that once a person chooses to and begins to assist a casualty; they take on a duty of care to continue assisting the casualty until they are stable. Situations that allow cessation of assistance include:

- The scene becomes unsafe for you or the casualty
- Another trained first aider arrives and takes over
- Qualified help arrives and takes over
- The casualty shows signs of recovery
- You become physically unable to continue

You need to be aware that Duty of Care requirements do differ across Australia, so you should check your legal obligations when moving or working interstate.