

Choking - children

When a child chokes you need to check for breathing, coughing or crying. The child may be able to dislodge the object by coughing. If there is no breathing, give four sharp blows to the back to dislodge the object. Ring triple zero (000) for an ambulance if the child is not breathing easily or at all.

First aid training is very useful in these situations and worth considering for all parents.

Immediate steps when a child is choking

There are a number of immediate steps you should follow when a child is choking:

- Check if the child is still able to breathe, cough or cry. If so, they may be able to dislodge the object by coughing.
- Do not try to dislodge the object by hitting the child on the back or squeezing the stomach – this may move the object into a more dangerous position and cause the child to stop breathing.
- Stay with the child and watch to see if their breathing improves.
- If the child is not breathing easily within a few minutes, call an ambulance (Tel. 000).
- If, after the coughing settles down, there is any continued noisy breathing or coughing, take the child to see a doctor as the object may have lodged in a windpipe or airway. If this is the case, it will need to be removed in hospital using a special instrument.

What to do when the child is not breathing

If the child is not breathing:

- For a young child (under about five years), place the child face down over your lap so that the head is lower than the chest. For an older child, lay them on their side. Give four sharp blows on the back between the shoulder blades to dislodge the object.
- Check again for signs of breathing.
- If the child is still not breathing, call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance. The ambulance service operator will be able to tell you what to do next. You will probably be advised to start expired air resuscitation (mouth to mouth) while waiting for help.
- Do not use the Heimlich manoeuvre (squeezing the abdomen or hitting the child in the abdomen) unless directed to by the ambulance service operator, as this can cause serious damage to organs in the abdomen.

First aid courses can be very worthwhile to learn about emergency response and these skills can save lives and prevent serious injury.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, dial triple zero Tel. 000
- Safety Centre, Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre Tel. 13 11 26 – seven days a week, 24 hours a day – for advice when poisoning or suspected poisoning occurs and poisoning prevention information
- First aid courses – Australian Red Cross Tel. 1300 367 428, St John Ambulance Tel. 131 394
- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Ring an ambulance on 000 if the child is not breathing easily or at all.

- Check for breathing, coughing or crying as the child may be able to dislodge the object by coughing.
- If there is no breathing, face the child down over your lap so their head is lower than their chest. Give four sharp blows to the back between the shoulder blades to dislodge the object.
- Do not use the Heimlich manoeuvre unless directed to by the ambulance service operator.
- First aid training is very useful.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Kidsafe Victoria

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