

## First aid kits

Your first aid kit should be organised, properly stocked and available at all times. It's a good idea to have a first aid kit in various locations such as at home, in the car and at work. You can buy first aid kits from your local pharmacy or from providers such as St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria) or Ambulance Victoria First Aid. Specialty kits are also available to meet specific needs.

If you are buying a first aid kit for general use by staff at your workplace, remember that Australian States and Territories have differing regulations on what they should contain. Check with your local authority if unsure – in Victoria, this is the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

It is strongly recommended that you participate in a first aid course so that you will have the knowledge and skills to help if someone is suddenly injured or becomes ill.

### Contents of a basic first aid kit

First aid kits vary according to their particular use. For example, a first aid kit for a farm will contain a few different items to a first aid kit for a city-dwelling family.

A basic first aid kit should contain:

- Triangular bandages
- Crepe ('conforming' or elastic) bandages of varying widths
- Non-adhesive dressings, varying sizes
- Disposable gloves (medium and large), preferably non-latex ones
- Thermal blanket
- Notepad and pencil
- Plastic bags, varying sizes
- Adhesive tape (2.5cm wide – preferably a permeable tape such as Micropore)
- Resuscitation mask or face shield.

Other equipment can include:

- Medium combine dressing pads (9 x 20cm)
- Large combine dressing pads (20 x 20cm)
- Adhesive dressing strips (bandaids)
- Medium gauze dressing (7.5 x 7.5cm)
- 4 sterile tubes of saline solution (minimum 10ml)
- 1 pair scissors
- 1 pair tweezers
- First aid booklet.

### Medicines in first aid kits

The Victorian WorkCover Authority advises that first aid kits for workplaces should not contain medications, because of the risk of allergic reaction. First aid is defined as the provision of emergency treatment and life support for people suffering injury or illness. The dispensing of medication would generally not fall within this definition.

If you keep medicines for yourself or your family, such as paracetamol for pain relief and aspirin, they should be kept secure and out of reach of children. It is recommended that medicines are not kept in a first aid kit. Make sure that you are aware of the dosage and the potential side effects of any medication you do have. Don't forget to check the expiry date. Remember that children and adults often need different doses. Special preparations of many common medications are now available for children.

## Storing your first aid kit

Storage suggestions include:

- Keep the first aid kit in a dry, cool location.
- Make sure the first aid kit is easily accessible and that everyone in the family knows where it is.
- Some items, such as solutions, may have use-by dates. Check regularly and replace when necessary.
- If an item is used from the first aid kit, promptly replace it.

## Know what to do

A first aid kit won't help if you don't know how to use it. Buy a book on basic first aid so that you know how to use the contents of the kit or, better still, participate in a first aid course.

## First aid materials explained

The various gauzes, dressings and bandages have different uses. Some of these include:

- **Adhesive strip dressings** – small strips of gauze attached to a sticky backing. These dressings are used for minor cuts and skin injuries. In Australia, they are commonly called band-aids. It is important to be aware that some people are allergic to band-aids.
- **Non-adhesive dressings** – best used for covering burnt or abraded (scraped or grazed) skin. Never use adhesive dressings on burnt or abraded skin.
- **Wound dressings** – these thick pads are used to help control bleeding and reduce the risk of infection. Different sizes are needed for different sized wounds.
- **Crepe or conforming bandages** – these elastic bandages are used to create pressure, hold dressings in place, reduce swelling and offer support.
- **Triangular bandages** – these non-elastic bandages are used for slings, to hold splints in place and to restrict movements.
- **Sterile eyewash solution** – used to flush eyelashes, insects, dust, sand or similar particles from the eye. Never attempt to remove an object that is embedded in or has penetrated an eye – seek urgent medical attention.

## Reduce the risk of infection

Open wounds are prone to infection. Suggestions to reduce the risk of infection include:

- Wash your hands before managing the wound.
- Put on the disposable gloves provided in your first aid kit.
- Try to avoid breathing or coughing over the wound.
- Cover the wound with a sterile dressing.
- Don't handle the dressing unnecessarily.
- Try not to touch the dressing's surface before applying it to the wound.

In an emergency, these suggestions may not be practical. If the injured person is bleeding heavily, don't waste time. Apply pressure to the wound immediately and call triple zero (000) for an ambulance.

## How to bandage

**This information is of a general nature only and should not be considered a replacement for proper first aid training.**

General suggestions include:

- The injured person should be sitting or lying down. Position yourself in front of the person on their injured side.
- Make sure their injured body part is supported in position before you start to bandage.
- If the injured person can help by holding the padding in place, wrap the 'tail' of the bandage one full turn around the limb, so that the bandage is anchored.
- If there is no assistance, wrap the 'tail' of the bandage directly around the padding over the wound.
- Bandage up the limb, making sure each turn overlaps the turn before. Alternatively, you can bandage in a 'figure eight' fashion.
- Make sure the bandage isn't too tight so you don't reduce blood flow to the extremities (hands and feet). Check by pressing on a nail of the injured person – if the pink colour returns within a couple of seconds, the bandage isn't affecting the person's circulation. If the nail remains white for some time, loosen the bandage. Keep checking and adjusting the bandage, especially if swelling is a problem.

## Making an arm sling

After bandaging, an injured forearm or wrist may require an arm sling to lift the arm and keep it from moving.

- Arrange the person's arm in a 'V' so that it is held in front of their body and bent at the elbow, with their hand resting in the hollow where their collarbone meets their shoulder.
- Open a triangular bandage and place it on top of the injured arm. The longest edge needs to be lengthwise along the person's body and the point of the bandage is towards the person's elbow on their injured side. You only need enough material to tie a knot at the fingertip end.
- Create a cradle (hammock) around the injured arm by folding the upper half of the long edge under the injured arm.
- Gently gather the material together at the elbow and pull it taut without pulling the bandage off the injured arm. Twist the material into a long spiral.
- Bring the long spiral around and then up the person's back.
- Tie the two ends together firmly at the person's fingertips.

## Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria) Tel. 1300 360 455
- WorkCover Advisory Service Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089

For first aid training, contact:

- St John Ambulance Australia Victoria Tel. 1300 360 455
- Australian Red Cross Tel. 1300 367 428

## Things to remember

- Keep a first aid kit at home, in the car and at work.
- You can purchase first aid kits from your local pharmacy or from providers such as St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria) and Ambulance Victoria First Aid.
- Consider doing a first aid course, so you know how to help if someone is injured or becomes ill.

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St John Ambulance

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