



First Aid Skills Every Family Should Know Before Vacation

Vacations are meant for making memories, not managing emergencies. No matter where you're headed — a sunny beach, remote cabin, or urban getaway — unexpected medical emergencies can turn even the best travel plans upside down. As a parent or caregiver, knowing the basics of first aid isn't just a good idea: it's a small step that can make a significant difference in critical moments.

5 First Aid skills every parent should learn

From treating minor injuries to responding to severe allergic reactions, here are the top essential first aid skills every family should know before hitting the road. Think of it as your family's safety checklist — one that can bring peace of mind wherever your next adventure takes you.

1. Treating minor cuts and scrapes

Kids are curious by nature, so bumps and bruises are almost inevitable while exploring new places. A skinned knee from hiking or a scraped elbow from a fall on the playground at a rest stop doesn't have to derail your vacation.

For minor wounds or abrasions:

- Rinse the area thoroughly with warm or room temperature water (with or without soap) to remove all dirt or debris.
- If bleeding is present, apply direct pressure with a sterile dressing or clean material for at least five minutes.
- If bleeding is heavy or doesn't stop, call 911 and treat it as a severe bleeding emergency.

Once bleeding has stopped, you can apply antibiotic ointment if there's no known allergies and cover with a clean dressing to seal the wound and protect against infection.

Vacation tip: Keep a well-stocked first aid kit in your car or suitcase. Tailor it to match your family's specific needs, including medications and comfort items to help distract young children during stressful situations.

2. Recognizing allergic reactions

A bee sting, new food, or unexpected environmental exposure can trigger allergic reactions. While some may be only mild reactions, others may develop into a severe allergic reaction — known as anaphylaxis — which can quickly become a life-threatening medical emergency.

Watch for symptoms such as:

- Rash or hives
- Swelling of the throat, lips, eyelids, or face
- Nausea or abdominal cramping
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing

If someone in your family has a history of allergic reactions, always carry an epinephrine autoinjector if prescribed no matter where you travel. Periodically refresh your memory on how to prepare and administer it, and practice with older children so they know how to self-administer if necessary.

Vacation tip: If you're traveling internationally or to a remote location, research how to contact local emergency services and double check the availability of medical care at your destination.

3. Helping someone who is choking

Choking is one of the most frightening and time-sensitive common emergencies, particularly when it involves young children. Knowing how to respond can prevent hesitation and ultimately save a life.

If the person cannot speak, cough, or breathe:

- Stand behind the person. Kneel if necessary for a small child.
- Make a fist above the belly button, grasp it with the other hand, and thrust inward and upward forcefully.
- Continue abdominal thrusts until the object is cleared or the person becomes unresponsive.

For infants under the age of one:

- Deliver five back slaps between the shoulder blades.
- Follow with five chest thrusts using two fingers in the center of the chest.
- Repeat back slaps and chest thrusts until the object is expelled or the infant becomes unresponsive.

If the person becomes unresponsive at any time, call 911 and begin CPR.

Even if the object is dislodged, it's important to still seek professional medical help afterward for internal injuries or airway irritation that may not be immediately visible.

Vacation tip: When dining out or trying new foods, keep a close eye on children. Avoid giving high-risk choking foods to young children, such as whole grapes or hard candy — especially when riding in the car or playing unsupervised.

4. Treating burns safely and quickly

Even in the most diligent situations, burns can happen fast with little hands nearby. Whether it's a hot pan in a vacation rental, spilled coffee in the car, or too much sun during a lake day, knowing how to treat minor burns can reduce pain, lower the risk of infection, and promote faster healing.

For minor thermal burns (red, painful skin without open blisters):

- Remove jewelry to prevent constriction from swelling.
- Cool the burn immediately under cool running water for five to 20 minutes. If running water isn't available, use a cool, wet compress or cloth.
- Continue cooling until the pain subsides.
- After cooling, cover it loosely with sterile, nonstick dressing or clean cloth
- Keep the area protected and monitor for signs of infection, such as swelling, increased pain, or pus.

Key things to remember for burns:

- Don't apply ice directly to burns.
- Leave blisters intact as they improve healing and reduce pain.
- Avoid natural home remedies like honey or potato peels.
- Never apply butter, ointment, lotion, or antiseptic to a serious burn.

Burns on sensitive areas (e.g., face, hands, feet, or genitals) or any burn caused by electricity or chemicals should be treated as an emergency situation.

Vacation tip: Prevent burns by keeping hot items away from counter edges, testing bath water before placing children in the tub, and applying sunscreen regularly to avoid sunburn.

5. Responding to bites and stings

Bug bites and animal encounters are common on family vacations that involve the great outdoors.

For insect bites or stings, remove the stinger as quickly as possible. Remove any jewelry as a precaution for swelling. Wash the area with soap and water and apply a cold pack for up to 20 minutes to reduce swelling and pain. Call 911 and use an epinephrine autoinjector if there are signs of a severe allergic reaction, such as facial swelling or difficulty breathing.

For animal bites, control bleeding with direct pressure. Then wash the area with soap and water for three to five minutes and apply a cold pack for up to 20 minutes. Seek medical advice as soon as possible (within 24 hours) if the skin is broken or the animal is unfamiliar.

Vacation tip: Use insect repellent outdoors, dress kids in long sleeves when hiking, and remind them never to touch or feed wild or stray animals.

The importance of understanding when to get help

It's just as important to know when to wait and monitor as it is to know when to seek professional help.

You should always seek medical attention if you notice:

- Signs of a head injury like confusion, vomiting, or loss of consciousness.
- Severe bleeding that doesn't stop with direct pressure.
- A possible broken bone or visible deformity.
- A high fever in a child that doesn't respond to medication.
- Symptoms of a heart attack such as chest pain, shortness of breath, or pain radiating to the jaw or arm.

When in doubt, call 911 right away. The faster help is on the way, the better the outcome can be. Until then, staying calm and offering reassurance can make a scary moment feel less overwhelming for your children and for you.

CPR, AED, and First Aid training is worth it

Emergencies are unpredictable, but your response doesn't have to be. Taking a CPR, AED, and First Aid training course can give you the confidence to act fast when it matters most.

Whether you're a new parent, frequent traveler, or simply want to be prepared for anything, formal CPR, AED, and First Aid training offers hands-on practice and real-world scenarios that can help protect your family members or anyone who needs help on your vacation.