



# Are You Prepared for a Medical Emergency?

Whether a church member falls down a flight of stairs, trips over an extension cord, or suffers from an allergic reaction on church premises, medical emergency preparedness can mean the difference between life and death, speedy recovery, or major complications.

For example, in cases of cardiac arrest, immediate defibrillation with an automated external defibrillator (AED) can significantly increase the chances of survival, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The equipment on hand, the effectiveness of the response, and the documentation of an incident may also help mitigate any liability claims filed against the church. Assembling a trained medical response team and charting an effective response plan is a great start to securing a safe environment. Taking these steps now can help prevent or diminish injury if an emergency does occur.

## Emergency Response Plan

After charting a plan and assembling a team, promote awareness within the community and secure the necessary equipment. To implement your plan, take the following steps:

1. Identify plan goals.
2. Designate members of the response team, along with their responsibilities.
3. Share plan and responsibilities with staff.
4. Communicate plan with general population through signs and announcements.

One important facet of effective emergency response is identifying potential risks. An emergency is defined

as an unforeseen event that requires immediate response. What common storms or natural disasters have occurred in your area in the past? What potential situations might your church find itself in during the year? Compile a list of potential risks and emergencies.

For medical emergencies, the first line of defense is awareness of the signs and symptoms of a potential emergency, including:

- difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- chest or upper abdominal pain or pressure lasting two minutes or more.
- unusual abdominal pain
- fainting, sudden dizziness, weakness
- changes in vision
- difficulty speaking
- confusion or changes in mental status, unusual behavior
- any sudden or severe pain
- uncontrolled bleeding
- severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- coughing or vomiting blood
- suicidal or homicidal feelings

## Supplies

Your church and your Pathfinder club should be a place where participants are safe from sexual abuse and violence. Ensure that your adult volunteers



understand the Seventh-day Adventist Church's expectations for those working with children as outlined in the *Church Manual*.

## Training

Proper training is an essential part of preparing to effectively respond to medical emergencies. To ensure your team is qualified, explore training options in your area. Most emergency services and organizations such as the American Red Cross and St. John Ambulance offer first aid courses. Make sure to compile a list of these resources to pass along when staffing changes occur.

## Automated External Defibrillators

One of the most powerful tools for survival in a medical emergency is an automated external defibrillator, or AED. If someone suffers cardiac arrest, the proper use of an AED may increase chances of survival from five to seven percent to 60 percent. Lawsuits have even been filed against institutions that did not have an AED.

When deciding whether to obtain the equipment, consider the possibility of people suffering cardiac arrest, taking into account environmental conditions, the best placement of the equipment (e.g., areas where electric-powered devices are used, or outdoor worksites where lightning may occur), and the age, health, stress levels, and fitness of your workers, members, and visitors.

Authorization to purchase an AED must come from a prescribing physician. Most AED vendors will provide the prescription with your purchase. When installing the equipment, it is important to make sure it is accessible from all areas of your building. AEDs require proper training and should not be used to the exclusion of Emergency Medical Services (EMS); rather, AEDs help increase the chances of survival while waiting for emergency crews to arrive. First aid responders should be able to effectively identify

cardiac arrest, notify EMS, perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), provide early defibrillation with an AED, and provide support to the victim while EMS is on their way.

## Safety First

In the article "How to Handle Accidents at Church Functions," Joseph Doukmetzian says, "Remember, if you call the emergency response number and the injuries turn out not be serious, the emergency responders can move on to their next call with no harm. However, if you don't call for emergency response and the injuries are serious, that could mean the difference between losing a limb, or even in dire circumstances, losing a life." He advises to err on the side of caution: you won't regret it.

## Reporting the Accident

Accidents happen, but how you respond to the accident is what you will be remembered by. It is very important to document an accident as soon as possible. The longer you delay, the harder it is to recall important details. These details can be crucial in protecting your ministry, especially if the injured person decides to file a claim against the church.

**PLEASE NOTE:** *The information within this article is to be used for educational purposes only and is not medical advice.*

### REFERENCES

[1] Adventist Risk Management, Inc., *The Minutes Between Life and Death*. <https://adventistrisk.org/en-us/safety-resources/solutions-newsletter/2015/november/the-minutes-between-life-and-death>

[2] Adventist Risk Management, Inc., *AED's: Automated External Defibrillators*. [https://adventistrisk.org/Adventist\\_Risk/media/ARMSiteContent/Safety%20Resources/English/WHP\\_AEDs\\_ALLEN.pdf?ext=.pdf](https://adventistrisk.org/Adventist_Risk/media/ARMSiteContent/Safety%20Resources/English/WHP_AEDs_ALLEN.pdf?ext=.pdf)

[3] Doukmetzian, J. (August 2021). "How to Handle Accidents at Church Functions." <https://adventistrisk.org/en-US/safety-resources/solutions-newsletter/2021/august/nad-how-to-handle-accidents-at-church-functions>