

Oftentimes, religious organizations are faced with a minor medical incident that needs nothing more than First Aid. Other times, churches may find themselves in the middle of a full-blown medical emergency. Knowing what to do in either situation can mean the difference between the incident staying minor or developing into a crisis.

According to the American College of Physicians, an emergency can best be handled by remembering four things: **Prevent, Prepare, Recognize, and Act**. By taking these steps and applying them to a church setting, you will better be able to protect the people and ministries at your facility. The following describes each of these steps in detail.

Prevent:

- Before beginning any job or activity, leaders should always determine the abilities and limitations of the participants. Ask yourself what risks there may be in doing the job or activity.
- Inspections also can be a great deterrent in preventing unwanted accidents. It is important to look at the location and equipment being used to determine if they are safe.

Prepare:

- Have a written plan in place that outlines what steps should be taken in specific emergencies. Know who to contact and what to do until professional help arrives.
- All organizations should have a well-stocked, up-to-date First Aid kit that is easily accessible. Since the first several minutes are critical, the right supplies should be on hand.
- Many churches have benefited from the training they give staff and leaders. Basic First Aid and CPR training should be a part of training in every organization.

Recognize:

- When something serious happens, it is important to be able to distinguish between what is minor versus injuries that are life threatening. Caution should be used. Without any training or knowledge, an injury could be compounded.

Act:

Once you have made a determination that something needs to be done, it is time to act. The following are steps to take when responding to an emergency:

1. **Act immediately.** Examine the person who is injured. If needed, call for assistance or send someone else to do so. Act promptly, but not so quickly that you miss something or respond incorrectly.
2. **Check breathing.** If the person is not breathing, start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, if you have been trained.
3. **Stop any bleeding.** A snug bandage or pressure dressing can often stop or slow bleeding. If this does not work, press firmly at the point that cuts blood flow off to the injured area.
4. **Check for shock.** Is the face drained of color, skin cold and moist? Is there a rapid, weak pulse or fainting? If so, have the victim lie down and attempt to calm them.
5. **Give attention to the possibility of poisoning.** If poisoning is suspected, use the syrup ipecac, and call the Nationwide Poison Center at (800) 222-1222.
6. **Should You Move Them?** Unless the victim is in immediate danger, do not attempt to move them. If you must move the victim, use a stretcher and try to keep their head immobile.
7. **Splint broken bones.** If a broken bone is obvious, try to splint the injury so that the joints are immobilized. Any stiff object can be used to set the injury. Cloths or bandages can be used to wrap around the stiff object and broken appendage.
8. **Treat burns.** Burns may be caused by chemicals or heat. Small burns should be placed in cold water. More severe burns should be covered with a large, clean cloth. Get emergency help immediately.
9. **Bandage wounds.** When it is necessary to bandage a wound, a sterile dressing should be used. This will help keep infection down, reduce bleeding and lessen pain.

By preventing, preparing, recognizing and acting, lives can be saved and injuries prevented. By having a plan in place, your church can better ensure that the people and ministries entrusted to their care will have a better chance of thriving.