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9-1-1: We Have an Emergency --When to Call For Help

Sometimes when a child is injured it's difficult to know when it's serious enough to call for an ambulance. Much of the time, the wounds are as superficial as a bump on the head or a scraped up knee. But other times – when there are broken bones, deep cuts and lacerations and head injuries – immediate professional attention is required.

Broken bones

It may be difficult to tell the difference between a sprain and a break. When in doubt, have it checked out – a broken bone requires immediate care. A child might have a broken bone if you hear an audible snap, if the child has difficulty moving the injured part of the body, or if the injured part of the body is very painful to the touch or is in an unnatural position.

If the injury involves your child's neck or back, do not move him unless the child is in imminent danger. Phone for emergency medical help immediately.

If your child has an open break (a bone that has broken through the skin) and there is severe bleeding, apply pressure on the bleeding area with a gauze pad or a clean piece of clothing or other material. Do not wash the wound or try to push back any part of the bone that may be sticking out. Keep your child lying down until medical help arrives.

If the child is not in imminent danger or bleeding, but appears to have a broken bone, he can be driven to the doctor or hospital emergency room in a car.

Cuts

Small cuts usually don't present a danger, and can be cared for with antibacterial soap and an adhesive bandage. However, large cuts or deep puncture wounds may require medical treatment.

If your child sustains a large cut or laceration, wash the wound thoroughly with water so you can see it clearly and assess the size. If the wound is bleeding profusely, place a piece of sterile gauze or a clean cloth over the entire wound. Using the palm of your hand on the gauze or cloth, apply steady, direct pressure to the wound for five minutes. If possible keep the bleeding part of the body above heart level.

Seek immediate medical attention if:

- The bleeding does not stop after five minutes of pressure
- Dirt or debris is embedded in the wound
- The injury is on the face or neck
- The injury was caused by an animal or human bite, burn, or puncture wound (such as a nail)
- The cut is more than half an inch long or appears to be deep

Head injuries

Head injuries can be superficial or serious. Minor injuries, such as bumps and bruises can be treated with ice and rest. However, more serious injuries, including concussions, require medical attention. Seek immediate professional treatment if the child experiences:

- Loss of consciousness, even momentarily
- Bleeding or clear fluid from the nose, ear, or mouth
- Blurred vision
- Slurred speech
- Pupils of unequal size
- Weakness or paralysis
- Feeling dazed or dizzy
- Seizure
- Vomiting
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Having trouble remember things, such as what happened directly before or after the injury occurred
- Nausea or vomiting
- Feeling groggy
- Difficulty with coordination or balance

If you determine your child's injury requires emergency medical help, remember to have your medical insurance card handy, as well as information about your child's medical background.

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