

Know what to do in case of an injury during floods

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As the flood water recedes and people go back to their homes to start clean up and recovery work, St John Ambulance Australia is issuing advice for residents on how to minimise injuries by applying simple first aid.

While many people rely on medical services for treatment of injuries, access to services could be delayed in a flood. Initial first aid treatment can reduce the severity of an injury, if the correct treatment is given. However, seek medical attention if the condition becomes severe.

“After a large scale flood emergency, there is an increased risk of injuries such as bites & stings, bleeding, as well as sprains and strains because residents are unaware of the dangerous hazards whilst cleaning up”, said Alan Eade, Chief Professional Officer for St John Ambulance Australia.

“If people take precautions when returning home after a flood, they can reduce the possibility of illness, disease or injury.” St John recommends all homes should also have a fully stocked first aid kit, with a spare one kept in the car.

First aid tips to treat the most common injuries during a flood:

Always wash your hands with soap and safe water (boiled or drinkable), if unavailable use alcohol-based products.

Bleeding

- Act quickly
- Put on gloves
- Lie the patient down (if large bleeding or the patient is dizzy)
- Apply firm pressure to the wound
- Raise and restrict movement of the injured part
- Apply a pad over the wound and secure with a bandage
- Never use cotton wool as a first aid material as the cotton fibres can cause complications in wound healing
- If bleeding is severe or persistent – call triple zero (000) for an ambulance

Lacerations and Cuts

Cuts from broken glass and debris can be a common problem. Wear sturdy waterproof boots and rubber or leather gloves.

- Put on gloves
- Clean wound thoroughly with saline or cooled, boiled water
- Apply non-adherent dressing
- Avoid exposure to floodwater which pose a risk of disease and contaminants⁴
- If the wound has been exposed to floodwater, clean it with soap and cover with sterile dressing
- If redness, swelling or discharge occurs, seek medical attention

Sprains and strains (RICE management)

- R – Rest the patient and the injured part
- I – Ice packs wrapped in a wet cloth – for 15 minutes on, re-applied every 2 hours for the first 24 hours
- C – Compression bandages should extend beyond the injury
- E – Elevate the injured part

Snake bites

Watch out for snakes. Be aware they might swim in water. Wear sturdy work boots and gloves and long pants to protect your legs and watch where you place your hands when cleaning up. If bitten by a snake, try to remember the colour/shape of the snake and do not wash the skin around the bite.

- Follow DRSABCD
- Calm patient and lie patient down
- Apply a pressure immobilisation bandage – apply a firm roller bandage starting just above the fingers or toes and move up the limb as far as can be reached
- Immobilise the limb using a splint
- Check circulation in fingers or toes (check blood supply in fingers or toes by pressing fingernail or toenail until it turns white, then release – if colour returns within 2 seconds, blood supply is unrestricted)
- Ensure patient does not move
- Remain with patient until ambulance arrives

ENDS

<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->

1,2,3,4 Environmental Health Unit, Department of Human Services, State Government Victoria (2007), *Flood hazards – protecting your health and safety* (online). June 2007. Available:
http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/emergency_mgmnt/flood_hazards.htm