

BACKGROUND ON ILLNESS

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First aid is often thought of in context to injuries only. When someone becomes very sick it can lead to a medical emergency and if first aid is used it may save a life.

Illnesses vary. Some illnesses come on very fast such as heart attacks and strokes. Illness such as cancer may come on slower and progressively get worse. In this case, you can see the person is getting worse but it may be difficult to detect when to call for medical assistance.

Indicators to help decide when to get medical assistance for an ill person:

- Problems breathing or signs of heart problems
- Sudden severe pain in any part of the body
- Sudden changes in vision, headache or dizziness
- Severe or persistent diarrhea or vomiting
- Persistent high temperature
- Changes in level of consciousness
- Skin rash of unknown origin
- Repeated fainting
- Obvious depression, suicide threats or attempts
- Whenever you are very worried about yourself or someone in your care

If the ill person is an infant (under one year old), these are some additional **reasons to get medical attention**:

- You think the baby is having trouble breathing or is severely congested
- The baby has a fever
- The baby has had or is having a seizure
- The baby is blue or very pale
- The baby cries a lot, or won't stop crying

You need to get information about a casualty in order to conduct first aid actions. When you first arrive at the scene, you are looking for information, signs and symptoms about the history of the incident.

History is the information about the emergency situation and the condition of the casualty. Take a look at the scene, talk to witnesses and talk to the casualty (if he/she is conscious). This is the way to find out what has happened.

You also have to look at signs of the casualty by using your senses. You can see, hear, feel and smell signs of injury or illness.

Symptoms are things the casualty feels and may be able to describe. You cannot discover symptoms on your own, the casualty must somehow communicate them to you.