

Recognizing Medical Conditions

Medical emergencies are a workplace reality. Not every supervisor needs to know first aid and CPR, but supervisors should know who in the building is trained to handle emergencies and what they can do in the meantime. Here are some common medical emergencies and some helpful responses:

Choking

First, ask if the person needs help. If he says no, you may only make matters worse if you interfere. If he nods yes—or motions for help—use the Heimlich maneuver. Call for help if the situation doesn't clear immediately.

Allergy Attacks

Allergy attacks are more likely to happen when a person is around paint, chemical vapors or insects (bees). Symptoms include itching, hives, swelling of the eyes or mouth and difficulty breathing. Have the person sit down in an area with clean air. If he or she is having trouble breathing or goes into shock, call for help immediately.

Heart Attacks

Symptoms include chest pain, shoulder pain, nausea, fatigue and/or sweating. Call for emergency help immediately. Have someone start CPR if necessary.

Diabetic Complications

Symptoms include extreme thirst, lethargy, weakness, mental confusion or coma. Call for help immediately. If the person is conscious, give him or her fruit juice or hard candy.

Seizure Disorders

During minor seizures (petit mal) the person loses awareness, stares and twitches. Once the episode is over, encourage the person to go to the hospital or see a doctor. During a severe seizure (grand mal) the person may lose consciousness, become very stiff and then twitch and jerk. Do not try to hold the person down or keep him still. Clear the immediate area to help prevent injury. Call for help immediately.

Remember that OSHA requires the use of a "pocket mask" with CPR to protect against bloodborne disease. There should be one in your first aid kit.