First Aid
Managing Head Injuries

When presented with a student, staff member or other person who has sustained a knock or impact to their head it is often difficult to ascertain the severity and the appropriate action to take, including when to call an ambulance. Although some bumps to the head will not result in an obvious injury, any head injury requires medical attention as the brain is the control centre for the body.

If there is any doubt that the person may have sustained a head injury, medical attention must be sought by calling Triple Zero (000) and requesting ambulance assistance.

Use this summary and flow chart, in conjunction with your first aid procedures and in line with your first aid training.

Head Injuries can include concussion, a fractured skull, cerebral compression and other brain damage.

Signs and Symptoms of a head injury may include (but is not limited to): loss of, or an altered level of, consciousness, confusion or memory loss, irritability or agitation, any obvious wounds or deformities, bleeding or clear fluid from the head, slurring, lack of coordination, bruising around the edges of the eyes and behind the ears, seizures, change in size or shape of pupils.

Note: With any head injury there is the potential to be an associated neck/spinal injury.

In summary -

1. Ensure immediate first aid attention is provided.
2. Seek the advice of qualified first aid officer regarding the initial management of the injury. Use the Management of Head Injuries flowchart to assist.
3. Remember that signs and symptoms are not always immediately present or obvious.
4. If the casualty is displaying any signs and symptoms of concussion or a head injury, or if there is any concerns about the condition of the casualty, call triple zero (000) immediately and request an ambulance.
5. If an ambulance has been called, follow the advice of the Queensland Ambulance Service Emergency Medical Dispatcher.
6. DO NOT give analgesics as these can disguise signs and symptoms of a more serious injury.
7. Protect the neck and spine and ensure the airway is clear.
8. Contact the parents/carers immediately following ANY head injury.
9. Ensure appropriate supervision by an adult until the ambulance arrives or until the casualty is collected by a parent or carer.
10. Ensure a record is kept of the injury and the actions taken e.g. first aid record / incident record.

Responses to first aid incidents should initially be conducted according to the Australian Resuscitation Council Basic Life Support flowchart: D-R-S-A-B-C-D.

D – Dangers?
R – Responsive?
S – Send for help
A – Open Airway
B – Normal Breathing
C – Start CPR (30 compressions : 2 breaths) if unwilling/unable to perform breaths, continue chest compressions.
D – Attach Defibrillator (AED) as soon as possible and follow its prompts.

This information has been developed in consultation with Queensland Ambulance Service. For more information:

- Refer to First Aid
- Contact Regional Senior Health and Safety Consultants for health and safety enquiries

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Head Injury
E.g. Blow to the head, whiplash, fall involving the head

Is the casualty unconscious or showing signs of concussion?

Signs of concussion may include: confusion, memory loss, irritability, combativeness, nausea

- Call Triple Zero (000) immediately and request ambulance

- Check Airway (clear and open)
- Check Breathing (normally)

Is casualty...

- Unresponsive and not breathing normally?
  - Commence CPR
  - Continue until ambulance arrives or patient shows signs of recovery, then treat accordingly

- Unresponsive but breathing normally?
  - Roll into recovery position
  - Ensure that neck and spine are supported
  - Monitor and record vital signs until ambulance arrives.
  - If condition deteriorates, treat accordingly

Are there signs of:
- blood or clear fluid from ear/nose?
- blackening behind the ears?
- unequally dilated pupils?
- obvious deformity of the skull?

- Position to encourage drainage onto clean or sterile pad.
- Do not pack the ear or nose with dressing as this can introduce infection and may increase the pressure on the brain.
- Monitor and record vital signs until ambulance arrives.

Are there signs of:
- memory loss?
- headache?
- unusual irritability?
- nausea or vomiting?
- loss of sensation or power in limbs?
- blurred or double vision?
- drowsiness?

- Monitor and record vital signs until ambulance arrives.
  - If condition deteriorates, treat accordingly.

Is there soft tissue damage to the head such as bruises, cuts or abrasions?

- Recommend parent/carer seek medical advice

Information on calling an ambulance is also provided in the First Aid Guideline – Calling an Ambulance in an Emergency

- Treat as for bleeding, wounds and soft tissue injuries. Do not apply pressure to the injured site.
- Monitor and record vital signs until injuries/casualty stabilised.
  - If condition deteriorates, treat accordingly.

- Recommend parent/carer seek medical advice

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