

Emergency Care

Pre-Reading Discussion: Have you or anyone you know ever had a health emergency? What was the emergency? What did people do to help the patient?

Directions: These passages are about different medical situations. After you read each one, decide if you think the situation is an emergency or not. Think about what the character should do, and what you would do if you were in their place. If you think it is an emergency then an action would be to call 911 for an ambulance, or to take someone to the hospital emergency room. If it's not an emergency, then an action might be self-care or calling the doctor's office.

#1.

Sondra's 11-year-old son Ted was playing baseball. A very fast ball hit Ted on the side of his head. The ball hit him just above his right ear.

Ted fell to the ground. He did not move. Sondra ran to him. Just as she reached him, Ted started to open his eyes and sit up. After a few minutes, a large bruise started forming on his head.

Sondra took Ted home right away. She gave him two children's Tylenol. She put an ice pack on the side of his head.

In about 15 minutes, Ted said, "I feel very tired. I want to go to sleep."

What should Sondra do? Is this an emergency? What would you do?

#2.

Three-year-old Dana was still sleeping. Her mom Tina thought, “By now Dana should be up and playing with her toys.”

Tina felt Dana’s forehead. It felt warm.

Tina woke Dana up to take her temperature. Her temperature was high. She had a fever of 101.2 degrees. Dana cried, “Mama, my head hurts.”

Tina made her breakfast, but Dana didn’t feel like eating. Tina gave her some juice and two children’s Tylenol.

The next morning Dana still had a fever of 101.0 degrees. She was still tired. She was achy. She did not want to play with her toys.

What should Tina do? Is this an emergency? What would you do?

#3.

Anthony is 34. He woke up at 4:30 A.M. feeling nauseous. He threw up, and then he tried to go back to sleep. He had a small pain around his belly button. He could not get back to sleep.

Anthony went to work the next morning. He was still feeling nauseous. At work the pain got worse. It was getting sharper. It moved from around his belly button to the lower, right part of his tummy.

Anthony did not want to leave work. There was a lot to do. He was afraid his boss would get mad. Two weeks ago he had the flu and missed five days of work. He did not want to get fired.

What should Anthony do? Is this an emergency? What would you do?

#4.

Mrs. Jefferson is 58 years old. She lives with her daughter Ella and Ella's family.

It was snowing one afternoon, and Mrs. Jefferson thought, "I will surprise Ella and shovel the snow for her."

She got out the shovel and went to work. Soon she felt very warm and sweaty, even though it was cold out. She was short of breath. Mrs. Jefferson tried to keep shoveling, but she had to stop. She did not feel well.

She went inside and sat down on the couch. After 20 minutes she still felt sweaty and nauseous, and she was still short of breath. She felt a little ache in her jaw.

Ella came home and found her mother on the couch. Mrs. Jefferson did not know what was happening.

What should Mrs. Jefferson do? What should Ella do? Is this an emergency? What would you do?

#5.

James, age 40, and his 15-year old son had played baseball all day. James came home tired. He had a lot of aches and pains from playing baseball. He lay down to rest.

Two hours later, James felt a dull ache in his chest. His chest felt tight. The tightness and pain radiated to his left shoulder. His left arm was feeling numb. Then he began to feel nauseous.

What should James do? Is this an emergency? What would you do?

ANSWER KEY

Situation # 1

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.

This is a classic description of an epidural hematoma. Usually, a brief loss of consciousness is followed by a lucid period that can last 15-45 minutes. Following this lucid period, the patient often falls into a coma, and there is great risk of death or brain damage without quick medical treatment.

Situation # 2

THIS IS NOT AN EMERGENCY.

Children run fevers. Most do not require emergency care and can be handled at home, or with a call or visit to a health professional's office.

You should bring children with fevers into the Emergency Room if:

- The child is less than 6 months old with a fever of 100.4 or higher.
- The child is more than 6 months old with a fever of 104 or higher for more than 24 hours.

Situation # 3

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.

It sounds like appendicitis, which is an infection of the appendix. When untreated, appendicitis can result in the appendix bursting. This can lead to serious complications, such as pus, bacteria, and cellular debris filling the abdominal cavity, and even death. People with a sudden onset of nausea, vomiting, fever, and shifting abdominal pain that settles in the right lower area of the abdomen should seek medical attention immediately.

Situation # 4

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.

This is typical of a woman having heart attack. Usually you hear all about the crushing chest pain and pain radiating down the left arm. However women more often experience shortness of breath that persists while at rest, sweating, nausea, and an aching jaw. Prompt medical attention is needed.

Situation # 5

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.

This is typical of a man having heart attack. Prompt medical attention is needed.