

What's on the Horizon for Public Health



First-Aid Kits: Not a New Idea

First-aid kits are nothing new. They go back over 100 years to when Robert Wood Johnson debuted the first-aid cabinet in 1888. For an interesting story google Johnson & Johnson First-Aid Kit History. First-aid kits have changed over the years, but they are as useful as ever.

When I think of first-aid kits, the image of a small red, white and blue box comes to mind. It was kept in our car and used for small scratches and bug bites or maybe to remove a splinter or a fish hook when we were away from home. It was the medicine cabinet at home that held a full array of bandages, liquid antiseptics like iodine, tweezers, aspirin, a thermometer and much more. Our family first aid kit was the help until we got home.

Today first-aid kits make it possible for ordinary people to be the help until 911 help arrives. You don't need a special certification to provide first aid, but you do need the right supplies and education. It is important to have a well-stocked and maintained first-aid kit. A necessary tool is the Red Cross *First Aid Fast Reference Guide*. It describes different scenarios and what to do. The American Red Cross also suggests that your kit include items like these: hand sanitizer, absorbent dressings, bandaids, adhesive cloth tape and rolled bandages, antibiotic and hydrocortisone packets, pain medications, a blanket, instant cold compress, sterile gauze pads, a thermometer, tweezers and any specific supplies your family might need. For example, if you have a family member with a severe allergy, include antihistamines or an epi kit, or if someone is diabetic include juice and a snack. It's a good idea to set a calendar reminder on your smartphone to review and update the supplies in your kit every six months.

A first-aid kit is a tool, but any tool is only as good as the person using it. There are ways to prepare for emergencies that have nothing to do with collecting supplies. Basic infection control through hand washing is something everyone should understand and employ. Learning practical skills that you can use to protect yourself and others is important. Skills like applying a tourniquet to control bleeding, initiating CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and knowing how to operate an AED (automated external defibrillator). AEDs aren't normally part of a first aid kit but can be found in many public locations for quick access.

Family, friends, coworkers, and bystanders—not first responders—are often first on the scene in a medical emergency. You can take action today by visiting www.ready.gov and the CDC website for information specific to being “the help until help arrives.”

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