UK EMERGENCY GUIDE

First aid basics & medical emergencies

When ambulances are busy, good first aid at the scene still matters — and so does knowing when to call. This is a short reminder of official UK steps for a few common emergencies. It is not a training course and it is not a substitute for 999 or NHS 111. If in doubt, call.

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

01 Call 999 or 112 for a life-threatening emergency: someone unresponsive, not breathing normally, bleeding heavily, having a suspected heart attack or stroke, or in severe difficulty breathing.

02 Call 111, or use 111.nhs.uk, for urgent but non-life-threatening problems, or if you are unsure. The call handler will tell you if you need 999 instead.

03 Learn CPR and first aid properly with St John Ambulance, the British Red Cross or another recognised provider, and keep their official first aid app on your phone.

LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY

999 or 112

Unresponsive, not breathing normally, severe bleeding, or another immediate danger.

URGENT MEDICAL ADVICE

111

When it is not a 999 emergency, or you need advice. 111.nhs.uk

This guide is general public information for UK households. It is not a substitute for the emergency services, official local advice, or professional medical training. In an emergency, always call 999. Official warning and response advice can change — follow current guidance from the emergency services, the NHS and gov.uk/prepare. Three Day Kit (threedaykit.co.uk) is an independent brand and is not affiliated with, or endorsed by, the UK government or any official agency.

BEFORE

SKILLS, KIT AND WHEN TO CALL

The most useful first aid happens before an emergency: a short course, a stocked kit, medicines that have not run out, and the household knowing 999 and their address.

01 **Learn the skills for real, not only from a leaflet**

Book a first aid course with St John Ambulance, the British Red Cross or another recognised trainer, and include infant or child first aid if you care for children — the techniques are different. Download the official St John or Red Cross first aid app and practise looking things up. Many employers will fund a course.

02 **Keep a kit and the medicines you already need**

Official preparedness lists include waterproof plasters, bandages, a thermometer, antiseptic, eyewash, sterile dressings and gloves, medical tape and tweezers. Add any regular medication, a copy of doses, and spare batteries for medical devices. Request repeat prescriptions at least five working days before you run out. Check dates every six months.

03 **Make it possible for others to help you**

Add ICE or Medical ID on your phone so emergency services can see essential information without your passcode. Write medicines and emergency contacts on paper too. Make sure children who are old enough know their address and when to call 999. If you have a serious allergy, heart condition or epilepsy, wear a medical alert if you have been advised to.

04 **Know 999, 111 and 112**

Call 999 or 112 if someone is unresponsive, is not breathing normally, is bleeding heavily, has signs of a heart attack or stroke, has severe burns, a seizure that is new or not stopping, severe difficulty breathing, or another immediate danger to life. Do not drive yourself to A&E in those cases unless you are told to.

Call 111 for urgent problems that are not immediately life-threatening, or if you are unsure. If it becomes an emergency, they will direct you. For less urgent advice, a pharmacist or GP is often the right first step.

05 **Look after yourself at the scene**

Only approach if it is safe. Do not put yourself at risk in traffic, water, fire or near damaged power lines. Send someone for help, or put your phone on speaker and call 999 yourself so you can keep treating the person. The call handler will tell you what to do.

> **This guide cannot teach first aid on its own.** Steps below are a short adult-focused reminder from published St John Ambulance, British Red Cross and NHS advice. For babies and children, get trained — do not guess from adult steps.

DURING

UNRESPONSIVE, CPR AND THE RECOVERY POSITION

If someone has collapsed, make sure it is safe to approach. Gently shake their shoulders and ask loudly if they are all right. If they do not respond, shout for help and call 999 or 112 — use speakerphone if you are alone.

01 **Open the airway and check breathing**

Gently tilt the head back and lift the chin. Look, listen and feel for normal breathing for up to 10 seconds. Occasional, irregular gasps are not normal breathing — they are common in the early stages of cardiac arrest. If you are unsure, the ambulance call handler will tell you what to do.

02 **If they are not breathing normally, start CPR**

Ask a helper to fetch a defibrillator (AED) if one is nearby. If you are alone, do not leave the person to look for one. Kneel beside them on a firm surface. Put the heel of one hand in the centre of the chest, the other hand on top, and interlock your fingers. With straight arms, press down hard to a depth of about 5–6 cm, then release and let the chest come back up. Do this 100–120 times a minute. The call handler will help you keep the rhythm.

03 **Rescue breaths only if you are trained and willing**

If you have been trained, give 30 compressions then 2 rescue breaths (tilt the head, lift the chin, pinch the nose, seal your mouth over theirs and blow steadily for up to one second until the chest rises, twice). If you are untrained, unwilling or unable to give breaths, give continuous chest compressions. Keep going until help takes over, they start to breathe normally, you are too exhausted to continue (swap every one to two minutes if you have a helper), or a defibrillator tells you to stop while it analyses.

04 **Use a defibrillator as soon as it arrives**

Switch it on and follow the spoken instructions. It will tell you whether a shock is needed and when to restart CPR. You cannot make the situation worse by attaching a public defibrillator — it will only shock if it is required.

05 **If they are unresponsive but breathing normally**

Call 999. Place them in the recovery position so the airway stays clear: arm nearest you at a right angle, other arm across the chest, far leg bent, then roll them towards you onto their side, tilt the head back, and keep checking breathing until help arrives. If you suspect a spinal injury, only move them if they are in danger or their airway is at risk — the call handler will advise.

> **Stroke — act FAST.** Face drooping, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty, Time to call 999. Do not wait to see if it passes. For a suspected heart attack (central chest pain, sweating, feeling sick, pain in the jaw or arm), sit them comfortably and call 999.

DURING

BLEEDING, BURNS, CHOKING AND SHOCK

01 Severe bleeding

Press firmly on the wound with a clean cloth, dressing or your hand to slow the blood, and call 999. Keep pressure on until help arrives. If blood soaks through, replace with a fresh dressing and keep pressing. If something is embedded in the wound, do not pull it out — press either side of it. Do not wash a wound that is bleeding heavily. If the person looks pale, cold or dizzy, lie them down, raise their legs if you can, keep them warm, and keep pressure on the wound. Public bleed-control kits (sometimes next to defibrillators) have instructions; the 999 handler can talk you through them.

02 Burns and scalds

Cool the burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes, or until the pain eases. If there is no water, cool milk or a canned drink can be used. Remove jewellery or clothing unless it is stuck. After cooling, loosely cover with cling film laid lengthways — do not wrap it tightly — or a clean plastic bag for a hand or foot. Do not use ice, creams or gels, and do not burst blisters. Seek medical advice. Call 999 for severe, large, deep, chemical or electrical burns, burns to the face, hands, feet or genitals, or burns on a child or a vulnerable person.

03 Choking (adult)

If they can cough, encourage them to cough. If they cannot cough, speak or breathe, call 999 and give up to five sharp back blows between the shoulder blades, checking after each one. If that fails, give up to five abdominal thrusts, then continue cycles of five back blows and five abdominal thrusts until the obstruction comes out or they become unresponsive — in which case start CPR. Infant and child choking is different; learn it on a course or from an official app. Abdominal thrusts are not used on infants.

04 Shock after injury, and hypothermia reminders

If someone is going into shock from blood loss, keep pressure on the wound, call 999, lie them down, raise the legs if it is safe, and keep them warm. For hypothermia, see the extreme-cold guide: call 999, get them dry and wrapped, cover the head, and do not use a hot bath or hot water bottle.

AFTER

HANDOVER, REST AND RESTOCK

01 Hand over clearly, then look after yourself

Tell the ambulance crew or A&E what happened, what you did, and any medicines or allergies you know about. First aid can be upsetting — talk to someone, and use NHS mental-health pages or Samaritans (116 123) if you need to. If you gave CPR or abdominal thrusts, say so, because the person should still be assessed.

02 Restock and book the training you postponed

Replace anything you used in the kit. Write down anything you wished you had known, and book a course or refresh your official app. Skills fade; a short refresher is more valuable than a long-unused certificate.

WHAT TO HAVE IN YOUR KIT

A Three Day Kit should always include a first aid kit and several days of essential medication, alongside water, no-cook food, a torch, a power bank, a radio and cash. In a period when health services are stretched, that combination — plus knowing 999 and 111, and having trained first aid in the house — is as useful as any piece of equipment.

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

TICK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

- [ ] First aid course booked or completed (infant/child training if relevant)
- [ ] First aid kit stocked: plasters, dressings, bandages, tape, gloves, tweezers, thermometer, antiseptic, eyewash
- [ ] ICE or Medical ID set on phones; paper contacts also kept
- [ ] Nearest public defibrillator location known (the 999 handler can also direct you)
- [ ] 111 saved for urgent but non-life-threatening problems
- [ ] Kit and medicines checked in the last six months
- [ ] A small first aid kit also kept in the car if you drive
- [ ] Official St John Ambulance or British Red Cross first aid app downloaded
- [ ] Regular medicines in date, with doses written down; repeats ordered 5 days ahead
- [ ] Children who are old enough know the home address and when to call 999
- [ ] Household agrees 999 for unresponsive, not breathing normally, or severe bleeding
- [ ] Allergy, asthma, heart or epilepsy plans (if anyone has one) kept with the kit
- [ ] Someone else in the household also knows where the kit is
- [ ] Three Day Kit includes the first aid kit, medicines, a torch and a written contacts list

UK CONTACTS

WRITE THESE DOWN

EMERGENCY SERVICES
999 or 112
Unresponsive, not breathing normally, severe bleeding, or other danger to life.

NHS 111
111
Urgent advice when it is not a 999 emergency. 111.nhs.uk

NHS HEALTH INFORMATION
nhs.uk
Conditions, 999 guidance, and local services.

ST JOHN AMBULANCE FIRST AID ADVICE
sja.org.uk
Online advice, courses and the official first aid app.

BRITISH RED CROSS FIRST AID
redcross.org.uk/first-aid
Online advice, courses and the official first aid app.

SAMARITANS
116 123
If you need to talk after a distressing incident.

NHS 111 MENTAL HEALTH
111
Urgent mental-health help, or use nhs.uk to find local crisis services.

OFFICIAL PREPAREDNESS ADVICE
gov.uk/prepare
Includes the recommendation to learn basic first aid.

SOURCES

Guidance in this booklet was checked against publicly available official advice in November 2026. Always follow the latest instructions from the emergency services and the links below.

1. St John Ambulance, CPR, burns and scalds, and first aid advice — sja.org.uk (CPR guidance clinically reviewed 18 September 2026; burns reviewed 28 April 2025)
2. British Red Cross, first aid for someone bleeding heavily — redcross.org.uk/first-aid/learn-first-aid/bleeding-heavily
3. NHS, when to call 999, 111, hypothermia, heatstroke, and first aid pages — nhs.uk
4. UK government Prepare / Be Ready, get prepared for emergencies (first aid skills and kit list) — gov.uk/prepare
5. Resuscitation Council UK guidance underpins UK CPR teaching delivered by recognised providers

General guidance only — not a substitute for the emergency services or professional medical training. Call 999 in an emergency. Independent brand, not a government publication. Infant and child first aid differs — learn it from a recognised course or official app.