

The emergency action plan

by Sports Medicine Australia

We have all watched major professional sporting events and witnessed incidents that result in injuries we would rather forget. You know, the type of incident that stops play and results in players being severely injured to the extent that intensive medical attention is required, and they are clearly at some risk of serious long-term or even permanent injury.

Fortunately, in most cases these events are supported by appropriate medical personnel such as doctors, physiotherapists and sports trainers to ensure that players are given the best possible initial care, and taken where necessary to the nearest and most appropriate local hospital for tests and follow-up treatment.

On the surface, the response of these medical personnel appears to be a fairly simple and seamless reaction to what are often very serious and sometimes career-threatening injuries. However, in reality the response is provided following a well-documented, drilled and executed emergency procedure often involving many more people than just the medical personnel seen attending the incident.



This may be fine at the elite level of many professional sports where there are specific medical personnel, team managers and other club and team officials to ensure injured players are cared for suitably. However, these incidents are not restricted to elite activities, and in most local team circumstances, the coach and other volunteers may be expected to fulfil these roles in the event of a serious incident.

Would you know what to do in an emergency such as this? Is there a clear and understood process to ensure that all coaches, officials and volunteers are aware of their role in an emergency?

A comprehensive emergency plan should be in place to cover all types of emergencies. They may include incidents such as fire, violence and environmental threats. This article will focus on medical emergencies that are likely to occur in the field of play.

All sporting clubs have a responsibility to ensure a safe environment is available to those in their care. This includes having a clearly documented plan that outlines the actions and processes that need to be fulfilled in an emergency situation.

A typical emergency plan may include reference to items such as:

1 The processes and the actions required of key personnel in the event of an emergency

- Each person should be familiar with their role and the actions required of them in an emergency. These roles should be understood by all involved. This may include coaches, officials, volunteers, parents, etc.

2 The location of the nearest phone and a list of telephone numbers for ambulance, local hospital or local health professional

- To avoid numerous people calling for emergency services, everyone involved in an incident should be aware of who is responsible for calling emergency services.
- The designated caller should also know the location of the nearest phone. All appropriate telephone numbers should be listed next to the telephone.
- If a mobile phone is used, make sure the caller makes the call from a quiet location with suitable mobile coverage.

3 The address details of the venue at which the event is being held, and in particular, any special directions that need to be conveyed to emergency response personnel

- In circumstances where a medical professional or ambulance needs to be called, they should be given any special directions for easy access to the venue and injured player.
- Venues should also ensure that designated access is available to emergency vehicles and the access is kept clear.

4 The person designated to take the lead responsibility in the plan

- Each person involved should know who will coordinate activities during an incident. This person plays a vital role in ensuring all aspects of the plan are fulfilled before, during and after an incident.

5 The location of any first aid and emergency equipment if required

- Like the telephone, this should be in an accessible location.
- First aid supplies should always be well stocked, so consideration should be given to allocating responsibility for first aid supply maintenance.

6 Contact details for parents, legal guardians or next of kin

- Someone should have the responsibility of informing parents, legal guardians or next of kin following the incident.
- The type of details to be conveyed should also be clearly specified and medical details should only be conveyed by, or with approval from, medical personnel.

7 Incident report forms and processes

- All incidents should be well documented using an incident response form. This should be securely stored for future reference.

It is important that all personnel are aware of their role and required actions in the emergency plan. Emergency plans should be documented and communicated to all club members and participants. These plans should be updated regularly, and ideally should be rehearsed often for reinforcement of actions.

Although these incidents may not occur often, a sound, communicated and well-understood emergency plan may mean the difference between life and death in an emergency situation.