

Pfizer Australia HEALTH REPORT

ISSUE #37



AUSTRALIANS AND FIRST AID

This edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report examines first aid and how Australians prepare for those sudden medical emergencies that everybody faces from time-to-time.

Eighty-three percent of the respondents in a recent survey felt that everyone should know how to perform first aid – but more than one-in-ten say they have been confronted by a situation where somebody has needed first aid and they have not known what to do to help.

Only seven percent of Australians feel confident that they could administer basic first aid to car accident victims.

Our partner in this Health Report, St John Ambulance Australia, warns that, on average, five people die on our roads every day. "As with any serious accident, or when somebody suffers a heart attack for example, the first few minutes of help can mean the difference between life and death. In the case of car accidents the people who are most likely

to be on the scene, and the people who therefore need to be able to apply first aid, will usually be other drivers," said St John Ambulance Australia CEO, Len Fiori.

In the coming months St John Ambulance Australia will be lobbying the government to make first aid training compulsory for all learner drivers, following a series of highly-publicised P-plater and learner driver fatalities.

The findings in this Report are based on responses from 1,460 Australians aged 18 and over to research conducted in November 2006 by independent consultants, Stollznow Research.

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FIRST AID – WHAT IS IT?

First aid is not just about helping crash victims at the roadside while you're waiting for an ambulance. Accidents and injury are a major cause of sickness and death in Australia. More children die of injury than die of cancer, asthma and infectious diseases combined¹.

First aid is the provision of emergency treatment and life support for people suffering injury or sudden illness. It can be as simple as calming an injured person or as profound as saving a life. In many cases first aid can reduce the severity of an injury or illness.

The aims of first aid are to promote a safe environment, preserve life, prevent injury or illness from becoming worse and provide comfort to the ill or injured – usually before the arrival of an ambulance or a medical professional. Sometimes it's just as important to know what NOT to do. For example, when people have a suspected spinal injury it is probably best not to move them, unless failure to move them is certain to endanger their lives further.

The majority of accidents happen in and around the home. Ensuring at least one person in every household is trained in first aid and you are equipped with adequate first aid supplies is sensible insurance for your family. You may save the life of a family member or friend.

At any time you could find yourself in a situation where someone has had an accident or is suffering from a sudden illness. Being trained in first aid will help you to provide appropriate care in the absence of medical aid.

It is important to keep your first aid skills up to date. Of the people surveyed, 41 percent had completed a training course more than



ten years ago, with only 11 percent having undergone any training in the last three years.

St John Ambulance Australia recommends that first aiders do refresher courses regularly – every year or so, so they can catch up on new techniques and get some all-important practice in a controlled environment.

Practicing on a manikin (used for learning cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or heart massage) is a lot easier than trying it for the first time on somebody who is in a life-threatening condition!

First aid courses range in length from a few hours to a couple of days. Course content is specifically designed to suit your needs, including caring for kids or a general course for the home or workplace. Make sure you're trained and know how to help.

1. Ten key facts about Child injury in Australia, Kidsafe WA. www.kidsafewa.com.au/factsheets/inews.28867.1.pdf



Compulsory First Aid for all Learner Drivers

St John Ambulance Australia believes, with the spate of P-plate driver deaths on Australian roads, it is time for all learner drivers to undertake first aid courses as a part of the requirements for obtaining a license.

The majority of road deaths occur in the first minutes after the crash, before the arrival of emergency services¹. Up to 85 percent of preventable road accident deaths could be avoided by administering basic first aid at the scene of the accident before emergency services arrive².

Road accident fatalities are most commonly caused by the victim suffering from an anoxia – loss of oxygen supply – caused by a blocked airway³. On average it takes less than four minutes for a blocked airway to cause death⁴. The normal response time taken for an ambulance to respond to an emergency call in Australia is eight minutes or more⁵. Based on these figures, many people will die unnecessarily if nothing is done.

Other common causes of road death include bleeding and shock. Both of these conditions can usually be treated successfully by a trained first aider who knows what to do in those crucial moments before professional help arrives.

Learning first aid is essential given research conducted for the Pfizer Australia Health Report revealed only seven percent of Australians feel very confident in administering first aid at serious road accidents. Ensuring all new drivers are equipped with life-saving first aid skills when out on the road will increase the chance that help will be on-hand in the vital first few minutes.

"Road crashes are the biggest killer of people between the ages of 18 and 25," said Len Fiori



of St John Ambulance Australia. "It's scary to think that we put young adults behind the steering wheel without the skills they will need when they are involved in a crash, or when they came across an accident. Even simple things like knowing how to put a victim in the recovery position, making sure their airways are not obstructed, or conducting CPR should be common knowledge for all road users. Sometimes it is even useful for people to know what not to do, as clumsy assistance can do more harm than good in certain situations."

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The St John Ambulance Australia Online Crash Course has been developed to save lives on the road. Learn first aid skills and procedures with this interactive first aid training course. Drivers with basic first aid knowledge can help treat people at accidents and help save lives. Log on to the Crash Course at www.stjohn.org.au so you'll know what to do.

CITY DWELLERS COMPLACENT

Would you recognise the signs of a heart attack if one of your loved ones suddenly became ill?

Would you be able to help a child who had fallen off a bicycle, broken a limb, and who was bleeding profusely from an open wound?

Would you be able to render help to somebody who had inadvertently taken a poisonous substance and had lost consciousness? Or been bitten by a spider or a snake? Or drowned? What about a pregnant neighbour whose baby decided to make an early entrance into the world?

First aid training covers all of these eventualities, and gives everybody the opportunity to be a potential life-saver.

Sadly, the research shows that city dwellers are typically less prepared for life-threatening emergencies than rural folk. People living in the country tend to be better equipped with both first aid tools and training than those of us who live nearer the emergency facilities that are more readily accessible in urban Australia.

The truth is, even with world-class emergency services, there is no room for complacency. Faced with a large-scale crisis (like the 9/11 attacks which stretched New York's emergency services beyond their limit), would you be able to step in, make yourself useful and save lives in your own neighbourhood? Chances are, each of us might be able to provide enough help to make sure our friends, neighbours and family had a good chance of surviving in the event there was a delay in getting professional medical attention.

Planes may not crash in our neighbourhoods every day, tsunamis may be rare, and injuries



arising from floods or bushfires may be infrequent, but they do happen. And that's when most of us will regret having failed to learn about first aid, according to Len Fiori.

Footnotes form page 3

1. Peden, M., Scurfield, R., Sleet, D., Mohan, D., Hyder, A.A., Jarawan, E., Mathers, C. eds. 2004, *World report on road traffic injury prevention*, World Health Organization, Geneva.
2. British Red Cross, 2006, 'First Aid Fact Sheet', British Red Cross, viewed 14 November 2006, <www.redcross.org.uk/standard.asp?id=46169>.
3. Fiander, S., 2001, 'Anyone can save a life - Road Accidents and First Aid', The British Red Cross, London.
4. Global Road Safety Partnership, 2003, *FOCUS: First Aid: it saves lives on the road*, viewed 29 September 2005. <www.grsroadsafety.org/themes/default/pdfs/First%20Aid.pdf>
5. O'Rourke, M. F., 2000, 'Surviving Cardiac Arrest', *Medical Journal of Australia*; 177/6: pp.284-285

Confidence matters

The latest research indicates that people who have undertaken repeated first aid training are far more confident of their abilities than those who have only done one or two training courses. About 94 percent of Australians are unsure of their ability to help in an emergency.

Seventy-three percent of Australians say that it's as important to learn first aid as it is to learn to swim. Seventeen percent say that learning first aid is more important.

More than one-in-ten Australians have been confronted by an emergency where somebody has required first aid, and have been unable to help. Only six percent claim to be completely confident that they would be able to render first aid if called upon to help.

It's not just getting the training that's important. First aid courses are readily accessible to everyone. The secret is to undertake refresher courses regularly – at least every couple of years.



St John Ambulance Australia recommends that everybody should do a refresher course in general first aid at least every three years. But they urge first aiders to do a refresher course in CPR every year.

CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) is a technique that one would need to apply if faced with a person who had stopped breathing and who's heart had also stopped beating. A person with these signs appears



to be dead – not moving or responding, no pulse, not breathing. But it would be a mistake to make that assumption. Many people who have been in precisely that condition have been successfully kept alive by first aiders for long periods of time, sometimes even hours, giving medical professionals a chance to get to the scene and perform more advanced resuscitation procedures later.

Much depends on the circumstances, but more often than not there's something meaningful that one can do in almost any kind of emergency, if one has the training and the confidence to take charge. The alternative is to do nothing. And that may be fatal.

This report has been produced in partnership with St John Ambulance Australia, a self-funding charitable organisation active in all States and Territories, dedicated to helping people in sickness, distress, suffering or danger. St John has been active in Australia for over 120 years, and internationally is part of a wider organisation with a long and honourable history. St John is Australia's largest first aid trainer, teaching practical life-saving skills to over three hundred thousand people each year. Courses are available all over Australia - for more information, visit www.stjohn.org.au



THE KISS OF LIFE

Approximately 75 percent of cardiac arrests (heart failure) and myocardial infarctions (heart attacks) occur at home.

Sometimes victims of a heart attack may suffer a cardiac arrest straight after the heart attack. Either way, if you want to help, you will need to know what to look for, and what to do about it.

Only 22 percent of people who suffer a sudden heart emergency get CPR before the arrival of emergency services. That suggests that most of us simply don't know how to recognise these problems – and haven't a clue what to do to help.

People who have a heart attack have a much better chance of surviving if the right things are done immediately. The longer the person has to wait before being given basic help, the higher the chances they might die. The same is true of people who suffer a cardiac arrest.

New techniques are constantly being discovered in first aid, and in 2006 the standard first aid procedure for giving CPR (which we sometimes call "the kiss of life") was simplified (see box).

It is likely that many people don't try to learn first aid because they imagine it is complicated and difficult. It isn't. First aid courses are aimed at equipping ordinary people to do it. The same applies to CPR.

First aiders aren't there to replace the ambulance or doctors – but they are there to help until the ambulance or doctors arrive.

If it is true that most heart emergencies happen at home then logic tells us that the person first aiders are most likely to help will be a member of their own family. Perhaps a mother or a father, brother, sister, uncle or aunt.



One rate: 30 to 2

In March 2006, the rates for CPR were simplified to 30 chest compressions and 2 mouth-to-mouth breaths for everyone (adults, children and infants). This makes it easier to learn CPR and to remember what to do if you need to perform CPR. If you haven't done a CPR course in the last 12 months, do one and find out how much easier it is to perform CPR.



Case studies

First aiders often save lives. In 2005, Christine (52) collapsed at home and her two sons performed CPR on her until paramedics arrived. Christine was down for 16 minutes and was defibrillated eight times by the paramedics. Without the CPR she would probably not have survived.

In 2006, Kevin's father suffered a heart attack just four days after Kevin had completed a first aid course at St John. He applied CPR to his dad for about 20 minutes and saved his life.

In 2007 two sisters, Chloe and Molly were bathing in the spa at their home when Molly's hair got stuck in the suction tube at the bottom of the spa and she nearly drowned. Chloe pulled her sister out of the spa and applied mouth-to-mouth while trying to get Molly into the house, where her father was able to help. Paramedics arrived within six minutes, administered oxygen and took Molly to hospital. Chloe had intuitively done the right thing by following a procedure she'd seen on a children's program on TV, and her dad had done a St John Ambulance Australia first aid course.

When Brian collapsed outside in the garden his 15-year-old daughter, Tara (both pictured) quickly realised what was happening and confidently started applying CPR. She took charge, giving instructions to her brother, and the team were able to save their dad's life.

Adrian assisted a casualty who had been hit by a bus and was bleeding heavily from a head wound. Adrian put into action his St John first aid training by following the DRABCD Action Plan and controlling the bleeding until the ambulance arrived. The young woman was discharged from hospital the following day in a stable condition.



Every day hundreds of lives are spared as a result of the intervention of people who have learned first aid.

Knowing how to provide first aid in those vital minutes after an accident can mean the difference between life and death. The St John DRABCD Action Plan is a six-step guide that can help you save a life:

- **DANGER:** check for danger to yourself, others and the casualty
- **RESPONSE:** check for response, is the casualty conscious or unconscious?
- **AIRWAY:** is the airway open and clear?
- **BREATHING:** is the casualty breathing? If not, give 2 initial breaths.
- **CPR:** if there are no signs of life, begin CPR at a rate of 30 compressions to 2 breaths.
- **DEFIBRILLATION** (if available): follow voice prompts



USEFUL CONTACTS

EMERGENCY SERVICES: Dial 000 (free call)

POISONS INFORMATION CENTRES: 13 11 26

DIVER EMERGENCY SERVICES (DES): 1800 088 200

AUST. VENOM RESEARCH UNIT (24HR): 03 8344 7753

Learn First Aid with St John call 1300 360 455 or visit www.stjohn.org.au

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