General Sudden Illness

Description/Introduction

Everyone gets sick. Sometimes, when a child or infant becomes suddenly ill, it’s not easy to tell what’s wrong. At times, there are no clues about what is happening. At other times, you can tell that something is wrong, but you may not be able to figure out exactly what is wrong.

There are lots of reasons children can get sick; for example, they may have picked up some germs somewhere, caught a virus or ate something they shouldn’t have.

What to Look For

When a child or infant becomes suddenly ill, he or she usually looks and feels sick, or acts differently than normal.

Common signals include:

- Changes in consciousness, such as feeling light-headed or dizzy or becoming unconscious.
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea.
- Trouble speaking or slurred speech.
- Numbness or weakness.
- Loss of vision or blurred vision.
- Changes in breathing. (The child or infant may have trouble breathing or may not be breathing normally.)
- Changes in skin color. (The skin may be pale, ashen [or gray] or flushed.)
- Sweating.
- Continuous pressure or pain. (Infants may cry uncontrollably.)
- Seizures.
- Inability to move (paralysis).
- Severe headache.

Continued on next page
Care

It is not necessary to know the exact illness to provide care. Remember, check the scene for safety first. Then, in general, follow these steps:

- Do no harm.
- Check the scene for clues about what might be wrong; then check the child or infant.
- Closely watch breathing and consciousness.
- Help the child or infant rest in the most comfortable position.
- Keep the child or infant from getting chilled or overheated.
- Reassure the child or infant.
- Give any specific care needed.
- Call or have someone else call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number for life-threatening emergencies, and provide care according to your level of training.
- Call the parents and follow their instructions.