

August 2024



Common Medical Emergencies



What is a medical emergency?

The answer is: Any serious illness, injury or condition which endangers the life of an individual. Due to this, there is no definitive list or limits to what a medical emergency can be (2).

Recognizing Changes & Seeking Treatment

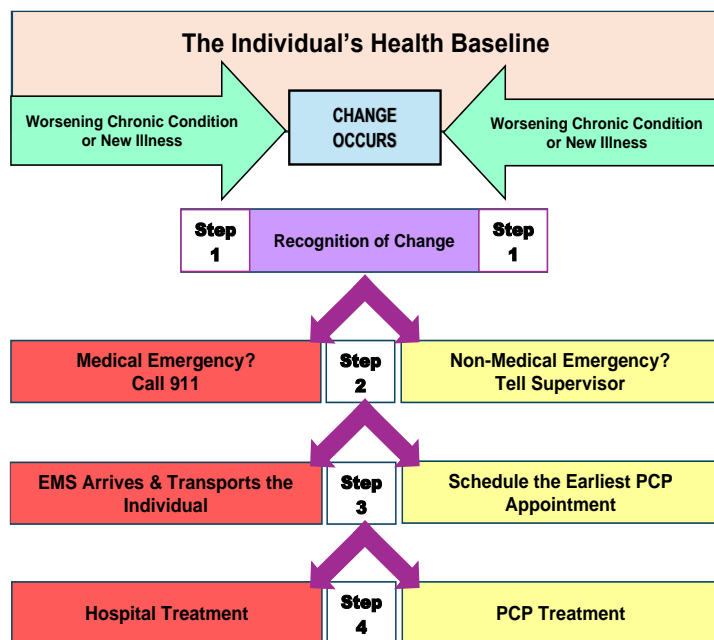
Caregivers have a responsibility to recognize health-related changes and take appropriate steps to get the individual the help they need from a healthcare professional promptly (4) (1).

Caregiver hesitation and delays in seeking treatment results in many preventable deaths and negative health outcomes among individuals with DD (3).

A Decision Tree

A decision tree can assist caregivers in determining what should be done next and can help guide caregivers to move through the process of getting the individual the help they need.

The decision tree below starts with the observation of a change in the individual's "normal state of being" (baseline) and walks the caregiver through the steps in obtaining the right kind of help for the individual.



Determining Health Risks for Each Individual

Each year, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving Waiver services in Virginia have an annual Individualized Service Plan (ISP) meeting to participate in the development of their person-centered plan.

Identifying and planning supports to reduce health and safety risks is an important part of annual planning. The Risk Awareness Tool (RAT) was developed to encourage thoughtful conversations, planning and follow-up with qualified medical professionals, about a person's level of risk in 11 health and safety areas.

The process has been critically important to ensure some of the most common potential risks are identified and referral to a qualified healthcare professional (regarding the risk identified) is completed. As of August 1, 2024 the RAT process has been fully incorporated into the individual's ISP and the new format labeled ISP 4.0.

Potential Medical Emergencies Among Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Individuals with DD are at higher risk for the following:

- Choking events.
- Seizures.
- Falls with and without injury.
- Sepsis signs and symptoms.

Individuals who have a history of a specific type of medical emergency occurring repetitively should have a protocol for that particular condition.

Individuals who are prescribed Diastat or those with ongoing seizures should have a person-centered care protocol.

Individuals with a history of sepsis should have a person-centered care protocol, which addresses signs and symptoms of sepsis and where to seek help, since rapid treatment is critical for survival.

A step-by-step protocol should include specific signs and symptoms, that would be considered an "emergency".

All individualized care-related protocols should be signed by the individual's primary care provider (PCP) or medical specialist.

Please direct any questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network "Health Trends" newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

References:

1. Barth, S., Lewis, S., and Simmons, T. (2020, October). Medicaid services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities – evolution of addressing service needs and preferences. *Health Management Association (HMA)*.
2. Borke, J. and Dugdale, D.C. (2023, January). Recognizing medical emergencies. *Medline Plus, National Library of Medicine (NIH)*, 1-4.
3. Hosking, F. J., Carey, J. M., Shah, S. M., Harris, T., DeWilde, S., Beighton, C., & Cook, D. G. (2016, August). Mortality among adults with intellectual disability in England: comparisons with the general population. *AJPH Research*, 106(8), 1483-1490.
4. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) Division of Developmental Services. (2016, July). Orientation manual for direct support professionals (DSPs) and supervisors: Supporting people in their homes and communities.

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ABA Snippets ...



Shaping up your Health: Part 1

Shaping is an empirically validated procedure that is implemented to help a person make gradual changes towards an achievable goal (1, 2). Shaping has been used to improve a multitude of behaviors that include, but are not limited to, speech, athletics, medical routines, hygiene, school attendance, sleep, weight loss, social integration, and much more.

To have an effective shaping procedure it is important to have a clearly defined goal in mind (i.e. SMART Goal), choose an appropriate starting point, have something desirable (i.e. reinforcer), set achievable expectations, and continue to reinforce closer approximations to the final goal (2). The following provides a fictionalized example of shaping in practice.

George Runs the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K

George used to be physically active, but over the years he became more of a couch-potato. George had become accustomed to coming home from work, cracking open a cold one, and sitting on the couch watching Netflix©. After receiving advice from his doctor, and suggestions from his wife, he decided to come up with a goal to get back in shape.

SMART Goal: By April 20th, 2024, George will run the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10k in under 1 hour.

George came up with a plan to run three times a week, and to time his runs with a stopwatch. He decided that every week he would increase the distance by a quarter mile, based on him consistently meeting the timed target he set. If he completed his run at the target time, he could watch his Netflix© content after his run. If he missed the mark, he had to watch everything his wife wanted to watch that evening.

It had been a while since George had run, so he started off with an achievable distance of a quarter mile. Every other day when he came home, he changed into his jogging clothes, prepped his running playlist with Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger," and ran. Once he was able to run the full length of a 10k, he focused on gradually increasing speed. After many cumulative weeks of making successive strides towards his goal, he was able to run the distance of a 10k right around, or even under, the mark of his 1-hour goal.

On the day of the race, George's family cheered him on as he achieved a time of 59:50.

George used shaping by making incremental progress towards an achievable final goal and reinforcing his small wins (successive approximations) along the way. Next month there will be another example of the uses and benefits of using shaping. Stay tuned!

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following:
john.tolson@dbhds.virginia.gov

References:

1. Cooper, J.O., Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L. (2020). Shaping. In Cooper, J.O. Heron, T.E., & Heward, W.L., (Eds.), Applied behavior analysis (3rd ed., pp. 540-555). Hoboken, New Jersey: Pearson.
2. Martin, G. & Pear, J. J. (2007). Getting a new behavior to occur: An application of shaping. In Martin, G. & Pear, J.J., (Eds.), Behavior modification: What is and how to do it (8th ed., pp. 125-133). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

National Immunization Awareness Month (NIAM)

National Immunization Awareness Month (NIAM) is an annual observance held in August to highlight the importance of routine vaccination for people of all ages.



5 Reasons it is Important for Adults to Get Vaccinated

1. Vaccines have saved lives for over 100 years—but serious disease is still a threat.

The protection some vaccines provide can fade over time and might need additional vaccine doses (boosters) to maintain protection. For example, adults should receive a tetanus booster every 10 years to protect against infection from dirty wounds.

2. Vaccines are the best way to protect against preventable disease.

Vaccines help the body create protective antibodies—proteins that help it fight off infections.

3. Vaccines can prevent serious illness.

Some vaccine-preventable diseases can have serious complications or even lead to later illnesses. Vaccination provides protection not only against the disease itself but also against the dangerous complications or consequences that it can bring.

4. Vaccines are safe.

Vaccines can have side effects, but most people experience only mild side effects—if any—after vaccination. The most common side effects are fever, tiredness, body aches, or redness, swelling, and tenderness where the shot was given. Mild reactions usually go away on their own within a few days. Serious or long-lasting side effects are extremely rare, and vaccine safety is continually monitored.

5. Vaccines may be required.

Students, military personnel, and residents of rehabilitation or care centers must be vaccinated against diseases that circulate in close quarters. Health care workers and others whose job puts them at risk of catching and spreading preventable diseases need to be vaccinated against them. Vaccination is required before travel to many places around the world and vaccines can be required for everyday activities as well as for extraordinary situations.

Recommended Vaccine Schedule for Adults:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/index.html>

Reference

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\). \(2023, July\). National Immunization Awareness Month \(NIAM\). National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.](#)