

First Aid, Health, and Safety for Girl Scout Activities

Make sure at least one adult member who is certified in first aid / CPR accompanies the troop/group to all activities.

What To Do If There Is an Accident

Although you hope the worst never happens, you must observe council procedures for handling accidents and fatalities. At the scene of an accident, first provide all possible care for the injured person(s). Follow established council procedures for obtaining medical assistance and immediately reporting the emergency. To do this, you must always have on hand the names and telephone numbers of council staff, parents/guardians, and emergency services such as the police, fire department or hospital. Check with your council for emergency contact information and keep your emergency action plan current with the appropriate contact information.

Your council may either have specific emergency contact information, a 24-hour emergency number, or both. Be sure to reach out to them for their preferred method of contact. If a Girl Scout needs emergency medical care as the result of an accident or injury, first contact emergency medical services, and then follow council procedures for accidents and incidents. You will need:

- the exact time and location of the incident,
- a description of the incident,
- the names of the people involved, and
- the names of any witnesses.

After receiving a report of an accident, council staff will immediately arrange for additional assistance at the scene, if needed, and will contact parents/guardians, as appropriate. Your adherence to these procedures is critical, especially with respect to notifying parents or legal guardians. If the media is involved, let council designated staff discuss the incident with media representatives.

In the event of a fatality or other serious accident, the police must be immediately notified. A responsible volunteer must remain at the scene the entire time. In the case of a fatality, do not disturb the victim or surroundings and follow police instructions. Do not share information about the accident with anyone but the police, your council, and, if applicable, insurance representatives or legal counsel.

When Someone Needs Emergency Care

Girl Scout members need to receive proper instruction in how to care for themselves and others in emergencies. They also need to learn the importance of reporting any accidents, illnesses, or unusual behaviors during Girl Scout activities to adult volunteers. You can help members by keeping the following in mind:

- Know what to report.
- Establish and practice procedures for weather emergencies.
- Know the type of extreme weather to expect in your area (tornadoes, hurricanes, and lightning). Consult with your council for the most relevant information for you to share with Girl Scout members.

- Establish and practice procedures for such circumstances as fire evacuation, lost persons, and building security issues. Every Girl Scout member and adult volunteer must know how to act in these situations. For example, you and your Girl Scout members, with the help of a fire department representative, should design a fire evacuation plan for meeting places used by the group.
- Assemble a well-stocked first aid kit that is always accessible. First aid administered in the first few minutes can make a significant difference in the severity of an injury. In an emergency, secure professional medical assistance as soon as possible, normally by calling 911, and then administer first aid, if appropriately trained.

First Aid/CPR

For many activities, Girl Scouts recommends that at least one adult volunteer be first aid/CPR certified. You can take advantage of first aid/CPR training offered by organizations such as:

- American Red Cross
- National Safety Council
- EMP America
- American Heart Association
- American Safety and Health Institute (ASHI)
- Medic
- Other sponsoring organizations approved by your council.

If, through the American Red Cross, National Safety Council, EMP America, or American Heart Association, you have a chance to be fully trained in first aid and CPR, doing so may make your activity planning go a little more smoothly.

Caution. Internet first aid/CPR training that is offered online may be necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions. Whenever in-person training is safely authorized, opt for in-person training. In-person opportunities are ideal to practice and receive feedback on life saving techniques. If taking a course not offered by one of the organizations listed in the previous paragraph, or taking any course that has online components, get approval from your support team or council prior to enrolling in the course to ensure you are using a council approved vendor and that an online training is acceptable.

First Aiders

General First Aider. A general first aider is an adult volunteer who has taken Girl Scout approved first aid and CPR training that includes specific instructions for adult and pediatric CPR, first aid, and AED (Automated External Defibrillator) training that, minimally, includes a face-to-face, hands-on skill checks for:

- checking a conscious victim,
- checking an unconscious victim,
- Adult & Pediatric CPR,
- Adult & Pediatric conscious choking,

- controlling bleeding, and
- sudden illness.

Advanced First Aider. An advanced first aider is an adult with general first aid certification and additional health, safety, or emergency response expertise. For example, a physician, physician’s assistant, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, paramedic, military medic; wilderness training, certified lifeguard, or emergency medical technician (EMT).

The individual activity’s safety activity checkpoints will always tell you when a first aider needs to be present. Since activities can take place in a variety of locations, the presence of a first aider and the qualifications they must have are based on the remoteness and scope of the activity. For example, if you take a two-mile hike in an area that has cell phone reception and service along the entire route and EMS (Emergency Medical Services) is within 30 minutes away, the first aider will not need to have knowledge of Wilderness First Aid. If, on the other hand, you take the same two-mile hike in a more remote area with no cell phone service and where EMS is more than 30 minutes away, the advanced first aider must have knowledge of Wilderness First Aid (see the chart below).

Access to EMS	Minimum Level of First Aid Required
Less than 30 minutes	General First Aid
More than 30 minutes*	Advanced First Aid or Wilderness First Aid (WFA) or Wilderness First Responder (WFR)

**Although a Wilderness First Responder is not required, it is strongly recommended when traveling with groups in areas that are greater than 30 minutes from EMS.*

It is important to understand the differences between a first aid course and a wilderness rated course. Although standard first aid training provides basic incident response, wilderness rated courses include training on remote assessment skills, as well as emergency first aid response, including evacuation techniques to use when EMS is not readily available.

Note: *The presence of an advanced first aider is required at resident camp. For large events—200 people or more—there should be, in addition to a regular first aider(s), one advanced first aider for every 200 participants. The following healthcare providers may also serve as advanced first aiders for large groups: physician, physician’s assistant, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, paramedic, military medic, and emergency medical technician.*

First Aid Kit

Make sure a general first aid kit is available at your group meeting place and accompanies Girl Scout members on any activity (including transportation to and from the activity). Please be aware that you may need to provide this kit if one is not available at your meeting place. You can purchase a Girl Scout first aid kit, you can buy a commercial kit, or you and the Girl Scouts can assemble a kit yourselves. The American Red Cross offers a list of potential items in its [Anatomy of a First Aid Kit](#) (note that the American Red Cross’s suggested list includes aspirin, which you will not be at liberty to provide without direct parent or guardian permission). You can also customize a kit to cover your specific needs by including flares, treatments for frostbite or snake bites, and the like.

In addition to standard contents, all kits should contain council and emergency telephone numbers (which you can get from your council contact). Girl Scout activity insurance forms, parent consent forms and health histories may also be included.

Overall, Health, Well Being and Inclusivity

Health History Form. Girl Scout councils require an annual health history form to be completed and signed by one parent/guardian for every Girl Scout and kept on file with the troop leader.

Follow council guidelines to comply with this requirement. The form should reflect any significant medical conditions, health issues, or allergies, and be updated each year. The form can also reflect any over the counter medication that a Girl Scout is not permitted to take, if there are any.

If parents send medication on trips or activities, it should be in its original labeled container and controlled and administered by one designated adult. Health history forms can be shared with the site, camp physician, or nurse ahead of time.

Always keep a current and signed health history form for each Girl Scout member with you when traveling. Your council may require an updated mid-year health history for overnight trips. For physically demanding activities, such as water sports, horseback riding, or skiing, an additional current health history form may be obtained to make sure all adults are aware of any current medical conditions or special needs. Councils will retain all health history forms in accordance with state record retention requirements and laws.

Health Exams and Health Exam Forms. Some councils also require a health exam for any activity that is three overnights or longer, which may include resident camp. Again, follow your council's guidelines with respect to health exams. In most cases, the health exam needs to have been completed within one year of the last date of the trip in order for Girl Scout members to participate. Your council may require a current health exam for adult volunteers who participate in trips of three nights or more as well; be sure to ask your council about their health exam policy. A health exam can be given by a licensed physician, a nurse practitioner, a physician's assistant, or a registered nurse. The medical provider must sign the health exam form.

For large events or trips longer in duration, such as resident camp or a weeklong trip to a ranch, the designated health professional at the trip location is responsible for collecting all health exam forms and health history forms for members and adults.

Health exam forms and health history forms are to be shared only with designated health professionals and council staff responsible for coordinating them. All health and medical information are private (by law) and must not be shared or publicly available, so keep forms safe and secure. Only share information on a need-to-know basis.

Councils will retain all health exam forms in accordance with individual state record retention requirements and laws.

Vaccination and Immunization. Issues or questions with respect to vaccination exemption periodically arise with activity and trip participation. Vaccine exemption laws vary by state and focus on public and private school attendance more directly than they do for youth organizations. Therefore, it is best to obtain local and state legal guidance and proceed in accordance with the state law as it applies to school attendance. A general overview of state laws regarding school immunization exemption is provided and annually updated on the [National Conference of State Legislatures website](#).

If you have any questions about your obligation to communicate a Girl Scout member's non-immunization with other troop parents, contact your Girl Scout council for legal guidance as privacy laws may apply.
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Absent state laws that speak directly to vaccines and communicating non-immunization with parents of youth groups, the guidance is to follow the standard and protocol as it pertains to school attendance.

For information on COVID-19 vaccination, see [Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts](#).

Mosquitoes, Ticks, and Lyme's Disease Prevention. Mosquitoes, ticks, and insect bites are an inherent risk to any warm weather outdoor activity. Ensure parents and guardians are aware of the need to have their children properly covered, preferably with closed shoes and light-colored clothing and socks. It is important to advise parents, guardians and Girl Scout members of this risk and the safety precautions they should take. The understanding that your troop or council cannot be held responsible for tick bites, can be reinforced with a waiver reference on a permission slip.

An excellent source for learning more is the [Tick and Lyme disease prevention section of Up to Date](#).

To learn more about using insect repellent safely, visit the Environmental Protection Agency website at [Repellents: Protection against Mosquitoes, Ticks, and Other Arthropods](#). To learn more about safely using DEET directly on the skin and on children, check out [EPA DEET](#).

Emotional Safety. Adults are responsible for making Girl Scouts a place where girls are as safe emotionally as they are physically. Protect their emotional safety by creating a team agreement and coaching girls to honor this agreement. Team agreements typically encourage behaviors like respecting diverse opinions and feelings, resolving conflicts constructively, avoiding physical and verbal bullying or clique behavior, practicing fairness, and showing positive, respectful, and helpful communication with others.

Physical or Sexual Abuse. Physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse of girls is forbidden. Sexual pressure, sexual advances, improper touching, sexual communication, such as text messaging, and sexual activity of any kind with Girl Scout members is not tolerated. If you witness or experience any behavior of this nature, notify appropriate council staff immediately. Incidences of abuse of any kind will result in immediate council intervention. Volunteers are responsible for following their council's guidelines for reporting any direct information or concern around physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse with respect to girls.

Youth Violence and Bullying. Youth violence or bullying is also not tolerated in Girl Scouts. Youth violence occurs when young people intentionally use physical force or power to threaten or harm others. Bullying is a form of youth violence. Volunteers should become familiar with the signs, risk factors, and preventive measures against this type of behavior. If you witness or experience any behavior of this nature, notify the appropriate council staff for guidance. The CDC provides excellent resources on this topic, including:

- [CDC Youth Violence](#)
- [CDC Bullying](#)
- [CDC Youth Violence Prevention](#)

Child Abuse. All states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have specific laws which identify persons who are required to report suspected child abuse to an appropriate agency. Therefore, if you witness or suspect child abuse or neglect, whether inside or outside of Girl Scouting, always notify the appropriate council staff immediately and follow your council's guidelines for reporting your concerns to the proper agency within your state. For more information, please review these available resources:

- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: How to Report Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
- Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: [Mandatory Reporters](#)

- [CDC Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention](#)

Mental Health and Safety. As an adult volunteer overseeing the activities and behaviors of young girls, and similar to child abuse, you may witness other signs of harmful tendencies such as self-harm. Self-harm can take a physical form such as cutting, burning, bruising, excessive scratching, hair pulling, poisoning, or drug use. Other tendencies of self-harm are suicidal ideations that can be expressed verbally or with the written word. Another harmful expression involves harm to others which can be detected verbally or with physical aggression. If a situation of this nature is observed or comes to your attention in any form, always notify an appropriate council staff member immediately and follow your council guidelines with respect to next steps. The CDC provides informative guidance around identifying and responding to harmful behaviors: [Self-Directed Violence and Other Forms of Self-Injury](#) and also a section on at-risk youth [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) Youth at Risk](#).

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities. Girl Scouts is committed to making reasonable accommodations for any physical or cognitive limitations. Talk to Girl Scout members of all abilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the location, facility, and/or instructors to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information visit [Disabled World](#). Whenever possible, the individual activity's safety activity checkpoints will provide additional resources specific to that sport or activity. Be sure to reference these resources when planning to include a Girl Scout member with a disability. Our goal is to include all girls with a desire to participate.

Equity. In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.