

## **Life. Live it.**

# The case for first aid education in UK schools.

First aid should have a central part in any preventative health education programme. The focus for health worldwide has increasingly moved to the prevention of unnecessary suffering, illness and death. In the UK, government efforts have been directed at promoting healthy lifestyles to children and young people to prevent illness and disease in later life. First aid education should be a central part of these health programmes, teaching skills that can prevent an illness or accident inflicting serious injury, or resulting in a fatality. Yet there is no comprehensive first aid education programme in UK schools.

In many health emergencies, interventions in the first few minutes, before the emergency services arrive, can make a crucial difference to the outcome for the casualty. If we are serious about preventing unnecessary injury and death, then we need to ensure that people in the UK have basic first aid knowledge.

The British Red Cross believes that first aid is a basic life skill that everyone should learn. In this report, we argue that teaching children and young people these skills through schools is the best way to make that happen. A survey by Ipsos MORI conducted for the British Red Cross shows that 93% of people in Britain also support first aid being taught in UK schools.<sup>1</sup>

By starting to teach first aid in all UK schools, we can help children and young people prevent serious injury and death in their communities today. By continuing to teach first aid in schools to successive generations, we can help build a community where every citizen knows how to respond to a health emergency.

### **What's at stake?**

Every year in the UK, there are 5½ million attendances at Accident and Emergency departments for accidents. Of these, there are 3 million attendances of the types of accident and injury that first aid treatment can benefit.

These 3 million accidents and injuries include, every single day, more than 2,600 open wound injuries, more than 2,400 bone injuries, almost 40 incidents of choking, and more than 290 injuries from burns. First aid skills are important in all these scenarios as they can reduce injury and promote recovery.

First aid can also save lives, and there are more than 8,000 deaths every year in the UK from accidents and injuries. A further 66,000 die from heart attacks and seizures.

### **How first aid saves lives**

This report explores how first aid skills can reduce injury and save lives in cases of accident and illness. For example, the evidence shows that:

- > immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can double or triple the chances of survival for a heart attack casualty
- > an unconscious patient with a blocked airway can have only 4 minutes to live – unless a bystander steps forward and does something as simple as tilting the head back to enable them to breathe
- > basic procedures like cooling a burn can reduce the need for skin grafting, lessen injury and promote healing

These are skills that all young people should learn as they grow towards independence, take part in risky behaviours and take on more responsibilities such as childcare and learning to drive. We should also want the next generation to know how to reach out and help others in need, whether it is a member of their own family, a friend or a fellow citizen.

### **First aid in schools**

The current picture of first aid education in schools is patchy and inconsistent. Across the four countries of the UK, there are a

couple of good examples of first aid provision on the curriculum in a few key areas. However, nowhere is there a clear and comprehensive programme for

first aid education in the curriculum. We believe there are **8 first aid essentials** that every young person should learn, wherever they live in the UK.

#### **The 8 first aid essentials include:**

- 1. Dealing with accidents –** assessing danger, keeping yourself safe, calling for the emergency services
- 2. Unconsciousness & resuscitation –** checking and clearing the airway, checking breathing, the recovery position and CPR
- 3. Choking –** checking the severity of choking, using back blows and abdominal thrusts (Heimlich manoeuvre)
- 4. Bleeding & shock –** compression, elevation of the wound above the heart, bandaging and identifying and treating shock
- 5. Burns & scalds –** cooling burns with cold water, and what not to do (such as covering with woolly dressings)
- 6. Specific injuries –** avoiding further damage to a fractured or broken bone, treatment of sprains and strain
- 7. Specific illnesses –** such as heart attacks, diabetic control, asthma attacks, Meningitis, epileptic seizures
- 8. Emotional and social –** reacting to stress, offering emotional support, the social dimension of helping others in need, and humanitarianism

The British Red Cross believes that it is fundamentally important that children and young people are taught these basic life skills. First aid skills are also easy to learn, and each of the 8 skills identified can be taught in a matter of hours. However, we recognise that there are different structures and methods for delivering education across the UK. That is why the proposals in this report are flexible and pragmatic.

We identify areas of the curriculum in which first aid could be taught, including personal and social education subjects, science, physical education and citizenship. We also set out a range of different options for delivery, including an important role for voluntary sector organisations like the British Red Cross in direct education, contribution to teacher training, and the development of resources used in the classroom.

We invite government to consider how best to deliver these crucial skills in schools, to enable the next generation to keep safe, stay healthy and make a contribution to our communities as active citizens.