Emergency Care Plans for Children with Special Health Care Needs

Thanks to new and advanced technology, more children with special health care needs are living at home than ever before, enabling them to participate more fully at school and in their communities. With this new independence comes a need to be well prepared for prompt, safe, specialized care in the event of a medical emergency. Families, caregivers, school officials, and community leaders all need to share and collaborate in this responsibility.

The Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) Program encourages parents (or guardians) and caregivers of children with special health care needs to develop a written emergency care plan and have it in plain sight, ready to go. This way, if and when an emergency occurs, family members, caregivers, bystanders, school nurses, teachers, and emergency medical services (EMS) providers will have the information they need to effectively initiate care — and possibly save a life. An emergency care plan is also a valuable resource for other health care providers, such as emergency room doctors and nurses and rehabilitation specialists.

Developing an Emergency Care Plan Is Very Important

Written emergency care plans should include brief but specific information about the child's medical condition, including physical and mental state. Parents and caregivers should work with their primary care physician, specialists, and case manager to develop a written emergency care plan that includes the following key information:

♦ Age
♦ Allergies (medications and food)
♦ Medical condition (diagnoses and relevant past medical history)
♦ Medications currently taking and medications to avoid
♦ Baseline findings (pulse and respiratory rates, blood pressure, orientation, etc.)
♦ Emergency intervention strategies (emergency procedures that best address your child's unique needs)
♦ Parent/caregiver information (names, phone numbers, addresses, etc.)
♦ Insurance information
♦ Primary care physician and specialists information (names, phone numbers, etc.)

The plan needs to be verified and signed by the child's parent or legal caregiver and primary or specialty physician. Copies of this document should be placed in several locations (e.g., near the kitchen telephone, in the child's bedroom, in the car, and at work). It also is important that parents and caregivers work with school nurses and local EMS personnel to ensure that this confidential information is quickly and easily available at school, child care, and recreation programs. If a child is active and independent at school and away from home, he or she may want to carry the plan in his or her backpack, wallet, or purse.

Communication Is the Key to Saving a Life

It is important that parents and caregivers take the time to introduce themselves and their children to their local EMS team. This initial introduction will help everyone learn more about the child's special needs — and feel more confident and secure in the event of an emergency.

In addition, children at risk for medical emergencies should consider wearing a medical bracelet or necklace to help emergency providers quickly recognize that the child has a special need. Until the medical personnel can access the child's written emergency care plan, it is important that they have a general sense of the child's condition.

Peace of Mind Is Only a Step Away

Developing an emergency care plan is an important step in caring for a child with special health care needs. It can give the child more freedom — and it can give parents and caregivers the peace of mind that comes with knowing their child is well cared for during a medical emergency. Be prepared, plan today.

For More Information . . .

For additional information on developing an emergency care plan for children with special health care needs — or to learn more about the EMSC Program — please contact:

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