

What would you do?

When medical emergencies occur aboard a vessel at sea, quick and appropriate action becomes a life-saving event. Falling overboard into cold water, suffering a compound fracture from a fall, or having an allergic reaction to a bee sting can become a major trauma unless there is someone aboard who knows exactly what to do. The chance of shock, permanent injury or death is not just possible, but likely. The way to ensure the best possible outcome is through First Aid training. The US Coast Guard requires everyone holding a basic Coast Guard license (OUPV – “Six Pack”) to complete CPR and First Aid training and hold a current certification. USPS requires any member desiring to become a BOC Certifier to be trained in CPR and First Aid.

Are you certified in these skills? Would you know what to do if an emergency occurred aboard your boat?

To check out your readiness for such unforeseen events, complete this brief quiz:

- 1) You are out boating on a beautiful summer day and drop anchor so you can cool off with a swim. You looked but did not notice Sea Nettles in the water. Shortly after getting in the water, you get a jellyfish sting. You get out of the water and see the jellyfish is still on your leg. What would you do?
 - a) Rub meat tenderizer over area to relieve the pain
 - b) Flush the skin with fresh water to get the jelly fish off and then rub the skin with Neosporin to prevent infection
 - c) Flush the skin with vinegar
 - d) Urinate on the affected area to remove the jellyfish and relieve the pain.

- 2) You and your spouse are enjoying a leisurely cruise on the bay and your spouse tells you she has some chest pain. She looks pale and weak and is rubbing her left shoulder. Soon after, she stops breathing and falls unconscious. What would do?
 - a) Call 911 on your cell phone and immediately head for your home port
 - b) Declare an emergency, get your AED, attach the leads and begin CPR
 - c) Call 911 then check for a pulse and begin CPR if needed
 - d) Start CPR and after two minutes of compressions and breaths, declare an emergency, then continue CPR.

- 3) While drift fishing on a cold March morning, your friend, who is not wearing a PFD, slips and falls overboard. The water is very cold and he does not respond to your call nor swims towards the ring you threw into the water. What would you do?
- a) Immediately dive in after him and pull him on to the boat
 - b) Drop an anchor and declare an emergency and stay in the boat
 - c) Drop anchor, put on a PFD, and go in after him
 - d) Put on a PFD, tether yourself to the boat and go in after him.
- 4) While sailing your shipmate gets hit in the head with the boom during an accidental jibe. He is knocked down and when he gets up, he is unsteady, disoriented, confused and has a severe headache. Soon after, he says he is okay, except for being dizzy and having a severe headache which is not going away. What would you do?
- a) Call 911 to have an ambulance waiting for you and head for home
 - b) Call 911, and be prepared to treat for shock while waiting for help
 - c) Declare an emergency on Ch 16 or on your DSC radio, keep the injured person lying down and quiet, with the head and shoulders slightly elevated and wait for help
 - d) Watch the injured person for signs of concussion like; seizures, bleeding from the ears or nose, or loss of consciousness and head for home. If any signs appear, declare an emergency.

When out on the water, we boaters need to realize that medical response to emergencies is not as fast as on land. According to the USCG Baltimore Sector, from the time they are notified of an medical emergency to the time the patient is delivered into the hands of the Emergency Medical System (EMS), could be as long as 2.5 hours. The average time is 1.75 hours. This means that all boaters need to know what to do when faced with a medical situation.

Now for the answers to the questions:

- 1) **C:** Jellyfish have million of small cells called Nematocyst which are what “sting” you. They can remain on your skin long after the jellyfish is removed. The first step is to neutralize the Nematocyst. This is done by flushing with vinegar / alcohol / ammonia or seawater. Never use fresh water or urine. Never “rub” anything on the site. Once neutralized, the Nematocyst can then be removed with shaving cream and a credit card. After removing the Nematocyst, flush the skip with hot water to relieve any pain or discomfort.

- 2) **B:** Whenever you suspect someone is having a heart attack, time is critical. The American Heart Association standards for adults require activating the Emergency Medical System before starting CPR. On a boat, that means declaring an emergency. Once help is on the way, you can start CPR if needed. Having an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) available will provide additional life saving support.

- 3) **D:** Getting someone out of the cold water before they drown or go into hypothermia, is your first concern. But you must do so at minimal risk to yourself. Never go into cold water without being tethered to the boat and wearing a PFD so you can pull yourself out if or when you start feeling weak or be pulled out if unable to get out yourself.

- 4) **C:** All head injuries must be considered life threatening. If an injured person shows any signs of a serious head injury (including loss of balance, confusion and severe headache), he/she should go immediately to a hospital for further evaluation. After declaring an emergency, have the person lie still with their head and shoulders slightly elevated while waiting for the Coast Guard.

How well did you do? Would you know what to do in an emergency? If the answer is “yes” and you are currently certified in CPR and First Aid, consider becoming an instructor. If the answer is “no”, enroll to take a course. The USPS is offering a CPR/First Aid Course at the Fall Governing Board Meeting in Greensboro, NC

For more information on CPR/First Aid Courses, email or call:

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