

Your Two Week Coastal Cruise Medical Kit

By Dr. Stuart Hochran

As a youth I heard my father lament the fact, as we were about to depart for our family's summer camping adventures, that he had insufficient knowledge to care for potential medical emergencies while away from home. Despite the amazing medical advances that have taken place since my childhood, it is equally amazing how little has changed with regard to emergency medical care away from home.

Your writer has the benefit of more than thirty years experience as a practicing physician, many of those spent in emergency rooms and aboard boats. While this article is not meant to provide specific recommendations regarding medical emergencies, we hope to present a basic approach to obtaining sufficient knowledge and a list of useful medical equipment to have on-board in case an emergency presents itself. The supplies suggested may require some basic understanding, or a call to a physician to properly use, but the list is meant to include materials that will be manageable by any boater.

As boaters, we generally fit into three categories relative to medical risk and the need for self-help capabilities:

1. Local boating where nearby friends or family can render or summon assistance within minutes
2. Coastal cruising away from home and perhaps hours from medical assistance

3. Offshore cruising, days (or longer) away from medical assistance

Preparing yourself to handle medical emergencies aboard begins with determining which of the above categories your cruise falls into.

For the purpose of this article we will address categories 1 and 2, local boating and coastal cruising away from home. A separate article will address offshore preparedness.

Essential References and Resources

Within categories 1 and 2 you will be able to a) communicate with medical personnel and, if need be, b) deliver a sick crewmember to an emergency room within a few hours. Many common on-board medical emergencies will, however, be treatable without outside assistance. In order to accomplish such on-board “fixes”, you need two things: a modicum of knowledge and some medical equipment. If your knowledge is insufficient, and in an emergency most of us need a little help, be sure to carry a medical emergency reference book aboard. Some quality examples of these are:

Pocket Emergency Medicine (Paperback), by Azita Hamedani, Published in 2003 by Lippincott Williams and Wilkins (\$57.98 at Amazon.com)

On-Board Medical Emergency Handbook: First Aid at Sea (Hardcover) by Spike Briggs and Campbell Mackenzie

The Onboard Medical Guide: First Aid and Emergency Medicine Afloat (Paperback) by Paul G. Gill, (\$14 at Amazon.com)

References such as these should be reviewed before problems arise, and will be welcomed resources in the event of a medical emergency.

If you are unprepared for the emergency despite your on-board medical reference book and personal experience, then your VHF radio and/or cell phone should permit access to medical advice, either by way or your physician or local medical personnel. The US Coast Guard stands by on channel 16 to intervene in an emergency, and local resources will be available on land.

Once you make an informed decision that your knowledge and experience are adequate to at least stabilize the situation, you then will probably need some medical supplies. Enter your “On-Board Medical Kit”.

Many retailers sell boating medical kits, such as Marine Medical Kits, Adventure Medical Marine and OceanMedix.com. These provide more or less what you will need, however, with a bit of cooperation from your physician and some planning, you can put together a kit specific to your personal capabilities and requirements. In any event, we urge you to have a quality medical reference aboard, and to have reviewed it prior to any emergency.

Your basic medical kit should at least include those items listed below, identified with an asterisk (*). Additional items are listed for the coastal cruiser. Items that can be acquired by prescription are marked with a (+). Certain drug allergies or medical conditions may preclude the use of some items, another reason to prepare ahead of time. I recommend that, once you decide what is needed aboard, you bring the list below to your personal physician for his/her opinions and recommendations, and for needed prescriptions. With basic medical knowledge and experience, the kit below will allow a coastal cruiser to stabilize most common medical emergencies, at least well enough to permit safe transfer to a physician or hospital. Many of the items above have expiration dates, and these should be replaced as required each season.

For your convenience, we list the equipment alongside its most typical purpose.

Suggested Coastal Marine Medical Kit

Medical Condition	Item
Lacerations	Iodine “preps”* Alcohol “preps”* 4 inch x 4 inch gauze* Assorted Band Aids* Steristrips-assorted sizes* 2” and 4” cotton rolls* ½ “ paper tape* One Point Sharp Scissors*

	Triple Antibiotic Ointment* Bactroban Ointment*+
Allergic Reactions	Epi-Pen (epinephrine)*+ Epinephrine 1:1000 bottle*+ Syringes and needles (25 gauge 1&3cc)+ Oral Benadryl 25 mg. tablets Claritin Tablets Prednisone 20 mg. tablets*+
Sea Sickness	Meclizine 25 mg. tablets*+ Transderm Scop Patches*+ Compazine 5 mg suppos.+
Infection	Z-Pack tablets*+ Augmentin 500 mg. tabs*+ Doxycycline tabs 100 mg*+ Cipro tabs 500 mg*+ Tobramycin eye drops Neosporin ear suspension
Asthma Episode	Pro Air (albuteral) inhaler+ Prednisone 20 mg. tabs+
Cough	Delsym or other DM OTC*
Anti-Inflammatory	Aleve Tablets* Advil or Motrin Tabs*
Pain Control	Percocet 5/325 tabs+

	Tylenol Extra Strength Tabs*
Minor Burns	Silvadene Cream Telfa Pads
Nasal Congestion	Afrin Spray* Sudafed Tabs*
Diarrhea	Imodium Tabs*
Gastric Upset	Pepcid AC tabs* Mylanta liquid* Ranitidine tabs+
Cardiac Arrest	Defibrillator+ ¹
Rash	Hydrocortisone 1% Cream*+
Cardiac Chest Pain	Aspirin 325 mg. Tabs* Nitroglycerine tabs+
Fractures/Contusions	Triangular bandage Finger Splint Arm Splint Assorted Ace Bandages
Miscellaneous	Stethoscope B.P. Cuff Thermometer

¹ Such as the First Responder defibrillator, from First Responder, www.FRES-CPR.com, (203) 557-0722

Adhesive Tape
Sterile Gloves
Sterile Operative Sheet+
Eye wash

Summary

No medical kit will provide every tool you need for every emergency. Nor will a kit take the place of preparation and education. If you have an emergency while coastal cruising, a kit such as the one described above will, in most cases, allow you to stabilize an ill crewmember. A call to medical personnel may provide further suggestions as to management, and the kit's contents may then be of even greater help.

Of course, avoiding accidents is always the best medicine. Here's to being safe on the water, and to not being caught short without the basic tools needed to handle a medical emergency. Just as importantly, never attempt to "fix" a medical problem that you are not trained and experienced to manage. Be quick to obtain medical assistance if you have any questions as to the best plan of action.