

Chronic Illness

First Responder Training Video Series—Information Sheet

Provided by the County
of San Diego Office of
Emergency Services

This document provides a brief summary of the information presented in the first responder training video relating to those members of our community who have a chronic illness.

Understanding individuals with chronic illnesses:

- Chronic illness may include heart disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, epilepsy, emphysema, and asthma.
- During an emergency, disease symptoms could be triggered by poor air quality and heightened levels of excitement, nervousness, and anxiety.

Visual cues to look for:

- An individual who is experiencing symptoms related to a chronic illness may simply look ill. They may also be shaking or look concerned and/or scared.
- When they speak, they may not make sense or may seem confused.

Specific sensitives to be aware of with individuals with chronic illness:

- A diabetic's blood sugar level could go up rapidly with adrenaline associated with excitement, nervousness, and anxiety. Be sure the person is able to test their blood sugar level.
- For respiratory diseases, individuals may require a rescue inhaler, nebulizer, CPAP machine, or other medical device that should be kept with them.
- Some individuals may have medical devices such as colostomy bags or urinary catheters.

Best practices for communicating with individuals who have chronic illness:

- Speak slowly and in a calm fashion.
- Ask individuals what assistance they may need and what medical equipment should be brought with them to manage their disease.
- Ask if they are able to bring their medications or a list of medications and medical records. Be sure to also bring food for diabetics who may experience low blood sugar.

Special thanks to the following organizations for participating in this video:

County of San Diego Emergency Medical Services
San Diego Fire—Rescue
San Diego Police Department
University of California, San Diego

