

In-Flight Medical Response: Managing Passenger Health Crises

A practical guide for airline crew and medical volunteers to confidently handle onboard emergencies, from common incidents to critical events.

Health Instructor: Alex Thompson • 5 sections • 48 lessons • 14.75h total

[View this course online](#) [Browse all courses](#)

About this course

An in-flight medical emergency is a high-stakes situation where you are the patient's first and sometimes only responder. Limited space, altitude, and resources make these crises uniquely challenging. This course provides the structured knowledge and practical decision-making skills you need to manage a passenger's health crisis effectively when professional help is hours away.

We will move from foundational assessment and legal considerations through managing common ailments like fainting and dehydration, to high-risk scenarios such as cardiac arrest, anaphylaxis, and stroke. The training uses step-by-step video demonstrations, real case studies from recent flights, and focused problem-solving sessions to build your competence and calm under pressure.

Course curriculum

Foundations and Scene Management

- **Assessing the Scene: Your First 60 Seconds (15m)**
Learn the step-by-step guide to safely approaching a medical event, checking for responsiveness, and calling for help while maintaining cabin safety.
- **The ABCs of Primary Assessment (20m)**
A focused review of Airway, Breathing, and Circulation checks tailored to the seated, confined environment of an aircraft cabin.
- **Activating the Medical Support Chain (12m)**
Covers how to notify the flight deck, use the PA for medical volunteers, and initiate contact with ground-based medical consult services.
- **Legal Protections and Your Duty of Care (18m)**
Understand the Good Samaritan laws and airline policies that protect you, and define the scope of your responsibilities as a responder.
- **Working with the Aircraft Medical Kit (25m)**
A guided tour of the standard and enhanced medical kits, including what each item is for and where it's typically located.
- **Effective Crew Communication During a Crisis (14m)**
Practice clear, calm communication protocols with other crew members to delegate tasks and manage the cabin environment.
- **Documentation: Recording the Event (10m)**
Learn what to note during and after the incident for the airline's records and for handover to receiving medical personnel.

Common In-Flight Medical Scenarios

- **Managing Dehydration and Heat Exhaustion (12m)**
Identify signs of dehydration exacerbated by cabin air and how to safely rehydrate a passenger.
- **Responding to Fainting and Near-Fainting (15m)**
Step-by-step response for vasovagal syncope, including positioning and monitoring for injury.
- **Handling Mild Allergic Reactions (18m)**
Differentiate a mild reaction from a severe one and manage symptoms with oral antihistamines from the kit.
- **Treating Minor Injuries and Bleeding (20m)**
Covers wound care, pressure application, and managing nosebleeds or small cuts in a moving cabin.
- **Assisting with Gastrointestinal Distress (14m)**
Practical steps for helping a passenger with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea while maintaining hygiene and privacy.
- **Pain Management for Headaches and Ear Pain (11m)**
Use of over-the-counter analgesics and techniques to manage discomfort from pressure changes or tension.

- **Addressing Passenger Anxiety and Panic (22m)**
Communication strategies and basic calming techniques to de-escalate a passenger experiencing a panic attack.
- **Assisting a Passenger with a Pre-Existing Condition (16m)**
How to help a diabetic, asthmatic, or traveler with other chronic issues manage their condition inflight.
- **Case Study: Dehydration Complicating a Long Flight (18m)**
Review a real scenario where multiple passengers showed signs of dehydration, and evaluate the crew's response.
- **Practice Session: Common Scenario Decision Trees (25m)**
Interactive problem-solving session to reinforce your decision path for fainting, minor reactions, and pain complaints.

Managing Serious & Deteriorating Conditions

- **Recognizing Cardiac Arrest and the Chain of Survival (22m)**
Identify the signs of sudden cardiac arrest and understand the critical steps that must happen quickly.
- **Hands-On CPR in an Aircraft Seat (28m)**
Modified techniques for performing effective chest compressions when moving a passenger to the floor is not possible.
- **AED Operation and Application in the Cabin (20m)**
A full walkthrough of using an Automated External Defibrillator, including pad placement and following voice prompts.
- **Managing a Severe Asthma Attack (16m)**
Assist with prescribed inhalers, administer oxygen if indicated, and monitor for deterioration.
- **Responding to Choking: Conscious and Unconscious (18m)**
Practical techniques for abdominal thrusts and back blows in a constrained space, plus managing an unconscious victim.
- **Diabetic Emergencies: Hypoglycemia and Hyperglycemia (15m)**
Recognize the different presentations and provide rapid sugar intake or seek medical guidance for high blood sugar.
- **Seizure Management and Post-Seizure Care (17m)**
Protect the passenger during the seizure, time it, and focus on safe recovery positioning afterward.
- **Suspected Stroke: Recognizing FAST and Limitations (20m)**
Use the FAST acronym (Face, Arms, Speech, Time) to identify a stroke and understand why ground coordination is critical.
- **Simulation: Unresponsive Passenger with Agonal Breathing (30m)**
A guided simulation putting together recognition, CPR, AED use, and crew communication from start to finish.

Critical Event Response & Coordination

- **Anaphylaxis: Recognizing and Treating a Life-Threatening Reaction (22m)**
Identify the rapid progression to anaphylaxis and the correct procedure for epinephrine auto-injector administration.

- **Administering Epinephrine: Step-by-Step (14m)**
A detailed, calm demonstration on how to use common auto-injector devices safely.
- **Triage in a Multi-Casualty Scenario (25m)**
Learn to use a simple sorting system when multiple passengers are affected, like after severe turbulence.
- **Using the Aircraft Oxygen System for Medical Need (18m)**
Proper setup and flow rate considerations when providing therapeutic oxygen from the passenger service unit.
- **Communicating with MedLink or Ground-Based Physicians (20m)**
How to give a clear patient report, follow instructions precisely, and convey critical updates.
- **Decision Making: When to Consider a Medical Diversion (19m)**
Factors the crew and captain weigh, and how medical input fits into the decision for an unscheduled landing.
- **Coordinating an Emergency Landing for Medical Reasons (22m)**
The roles of crew during a diversion, from preparing the passenger and cabin to liaising with ground personnel.
- **Case Study: Managing a Suspected MI with Crew Communication (16m)**
Analyze a complex event where good communication between the volunteer doctor, crew, and ground support saved time.
- **Case Study: Severe Allergic Reaction Over the Ocean (15m)**
Review the decision-making process for anaphylaxis treatment when the nearest airport is two hours away.
- **Simulation: Multi-System Trauma After Turbulence (32m)**
A complex scenario involving triage, spine injury management, and coordinating multiple first responders among passengers.

Integration & Crew Resource Management

- **Post-Event Care: Monitoring Until Handover (14m)**
Continue vital sign monitoring and provide comfort care for the patient after the immediate crisis is controlled.
- **The Handover to EMS: What Information to Provide (18m)**
Prepare a concise verbal and written report for paramedics, including timeline, interventions, and patient history.
- **Psychological First Aid for the Patient and Crew (20m)**
Recognize acute stress reactions in passengers, volunteers, and fellow crew members after the event.
- **Crew Debriefing: What Went Well and What to Improve (15m)**
Conduct a structured, blame-free debrief to learn from the experience and update procedures.
- **Equipment Check: Advanced Kit Inventory and Restocking (12m)**
How to log used items, perform a post-flight kit check, and understand restocking protocols.
- **AED Proficiency: Battery and Pad Checks (10m)**
Daily and monthly checks for the AED to ensure it is always flight-ready.
- **Psychological First Aid for Witnesses and Bystanders (16m)**
Techniques for calming and supporting other passengers who may have been frightened by the event.

- **Scenario Drill: Anaphylaxis with Communication Breakdown (28m)**
Practice managing the medical crisis when the intercom fails or ground connection is lost.
- **Scenario Drill: Cardiac Arrest During Meal Service (25m)**
Navigate the chaos of managing a medical emergency in a crowded aisle with service carts in the way.
- **Scenario Drill: Unresponsive Child with Fever (22m)**
Handle the heightened anxiety of a pediatric emergency and differentiate from a febrile seizure.
- **Building Personal Confidence and Preparedness (18m)**
Final review of key protocols, mental rehearsal techniques, and maintaining your skills over time.
- **Course Summary and Key Takeaways (15m)**
A concise recap of the entire response framework, from scene assessment to crew debriefing.

Discover our blog

Learn more with free articles written by our professors and guest experts.

Latest article: **[Flight Attendant Preparation: What to Study Before You Apply](#)**

[Visit the blog](#) [All courses](#) [This course](#)