



position statement on

FIRST AID LEARNING FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

At some point in every body's life it is likely first aid will be needed—whether patching a scrape on a child's knee, or treatment for a more serious condition such as sudden cardiac arrest, a head injury or stroke.

First aid knowledge and skills are vital for individuals, families and communities. At St John Ambulance Australia we believe that every person has a role in aiding a fellow citizen experiencing illness, injury or distress, to the best of their ability. Learning first aid is a basic life skill and part of active citizenship.

We believe that children can play a significant role in part of the response to injury and illness in the community. Research suggests that children as young as 6 years can learn aspects of basic first aid—which begs the question 'Why isn't everyone first aid literate?'¹ Ensuring basic first aid awareness programs are accessible to the community is an essential component of creating a resilient Australia.^{1,2}

BACKGROUND

Children are frequently the first at the scene of an incident, and are often required to act when no adult is available to assist. With research showing children from 6–7 years being able to perform first aid, learn CPR, use a defibrillator and place an emergency call, it seems logical that Australia's student population be trained in basic first aid.²

Training in resuscitation skills for school children started in Norway in the 1960s.³ Since then several other countries, including Canada, Great Britain, the United States of America and Scandinavia, have adopted compulsory teaching of first aid and CPR to school children, due to the public health benefits.⁴ The success of compulsory first aid programs in Norway, Austria and Germany has led to 19% of European countries adopting compulsory first aid in schools.⁵ In countries without compulsory requirements, such as Northern Ireland, the uptake of voluntary first aid training is low, with an estimated 5% of the population trained and 6.6% of school children.^{2,6}

Making first aid a part of everybody's life.

Where included in the Australian curriculum, school-aged children are guaranteed exposure to first aid training. In Australia however, first aid training is only compulsory for Year 9 and 10 students. This presents two main problems:

1. Australia is missing the opportunity to have a greater proportion of the population trained in first aid. The more people with first aid knowledge and skills, the more lives saved.
2. Evidence suggests that continuity in learning creates a solid understanding and acquisition of subject matter. It also provides the confidence and motivation to employ first aid skills when and if necessary.⁵ Including first aid learning only for Years 9 and 10 in the Australian Curriculum, means other students are missing the opportunity to cement their learning.

St John believes that student first aid learning will ensure a strong foundation for developing a culture of first aid preparedness in Australia and the prevention of unnecessary loss of life.

Since 2012, St John has made several representations to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) regarding the importance of including age appropriate basic first aid awareness training in the Australian Curriculum (Health and Physical Education [HPE] Curriculum). To date, first aid and CPR learning is only included as 'content description' (mandatory learning) for years 9 and 10. For Years 7 and 8, first aid is non-mandatory but may be found in 'content elaborations' (examples to illustrate how content descriptions may be achieved in the classroom). First aid learning is omitted from the primary curriculum.⁷

POLICY POSITIONS

1. **ADVOCACY:** St John will continue to advocate to governments regarding the importance of the inclusion of basic first aid awareness training in the Australian Curriculum (for Foundation–Year 8).
2. **TRAINING:** St John Ambulance Australia entities will continue to deliver free, the St John First Aid in Schools program, nationally. Further, the Australian Office will consider other ways that St John might bring first aid learning to a broader cross-section of the national school-aged children population.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

Annually, the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Office will report on progress against this Position Statement, and make recommendations regarding revision as required.

CHAMPIONS

The Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Office will lead activities of national significance. Chief Executive Officers of the State/Territory St John entities will champion programs in their state/territory.

NOTES

1. Eisenburger P, Safar P. Life supporting first aid training of the public—review and recommendations. *Resuscitation* 1999;41(1):3–18. PubMed.
2. Uray T, Lunzer A, Ochsenhofer L, Zingerle R, Lillie P, Brandl E, Sterz F, LFSA Study Group. Feasibility of life-supporting first aid (LSFA) training as a mandatory subject in primary schools. *Resuscitation* 2003;59:211–20. Elsevier, UK.

3. Nurenberger C, Schoenberg T, Urso T, Hobart R, Fleischhagl K, Zarhuber N, Laggner S. (n.d.). Compulsory first-aid training in Australian schools. Department of Emergency Medicine, Medical University of Vienna, Austria. Elsevier.
4. Miro O, Jimenez-Fabrega X, Espigol G, Culla A, Escalada-Roig X, Diaz N, Salvador J, Abad J, Sanchez M. Teaching basic life support to 12–16 year olds in Barcelona schools: Views of head teachers. *Resuscitation* 2006;70:107–16. Elsevier, UK.
5. <http://www.stjohnsa.com.au/the-governor-of-south-australia-gets-hands-on-with-first-aid-training/> Accessed 18 November 2013.
6. Campbell S. Supporting mandatory first aid training in primary schools. *Nursing Standard* 2012;27(6):35–9. Retrieved from Ebscohost.
7. <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/health-and-physical-education/curriculum/f-10?layout=1>