



Public Health
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Board of Health

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Seizures

What is a seizure?

Seizure disorders are produced by brief temporary changes in the normal functioning of the brain's electrical system. The brain consists of billions of neurons that communicate with each other by way of electrical impulses.

These brief malfunctions mean that more than the usual amount of electrical energy passes between cells. The sudden overload may stay in one small area of the brain, or it may swamp the whole system. Of course, you can't see what is happening inside of a person's brain. But you can see the unusual body movements, the effects on consciousness, and the changed behavior that the malfunctioning areas are producing.

These changes are what we call seizures. You may have heard the term epilepsy, this term refers to people who have had more than one seizure or that the person has a seizure tendency.

Seizures can take on many different forms according to where in the brain the malfunction takes place and how much of the total brain is involved.

- Can make some lose consciousness
- Stiffens unexpectedly
- Falls to the ground jerking or convulsions (may be an extremity shaking or the whole body).
- The person may appear unresponsive, confused, dazed (as if half asleep)
- Automatic movements such as smacking of the lips.
- Wandering
- Fumbling movement of the hand may be present.
- The person may display inappropriate behavior. (Making him feel afraid or angry, or make things look different from what they really are.

Person may just stare and stop what they are doing. Eyes drift upward and flicker. (The seizure can be mistaken for daydreaming, the person may not even know they had a seizure).

Seizures look different because they affect different parts of the brain. But they are alike in many ways:

- They don't last long.
- You don't have to do anything to stop them. They stop on their own.
- They aren't medical emergencies(except in a few rare cases we will talk about later)
- Most of them don't require any first aid at all.
- When first aid is needed it is mostly to keep the child safe until the seizure is over.

What to do when someone has a seizure?

- Stay calm
- Time the seizure
- Remove any hard or sharp objects from the area
- Place something flat and soft under the head
- Loosen any tight clothing around the neck
- Do not try to restrain or hold down
- Don't force anything in his mouth(could break teeth ,person will not swallow their tongue)
- When the convulsion part of the seizure is at an end, place the person onto their sides to allow excess saliva to drain from the mouth.
- Offer support and reassurance after the seizure. (Reorient or repeat any information they have missed).
- Allow the person to rest until they are fully recovered.(may become sleepy after a seizure, may fall into a deep sleep; this is normal ,and you should not try to wake the person up)

There may be a warning that a seizure is going to start. This could include an abdominal discomfort, a movement or sensation in one part of the body, visual disturbances, feelings of fatigue, or just an odd feeling. Each child will have a plan as to what to expect.

Call an ambulance if:

- The seizure lasts more than 5 minutes
- The person fails to regain unconsciousness(vomits during seizure or not breathing properly)
- One seizure follows another
- The person has been injured
- An unexpected seizure happens in a child who does not have epilepsy.