

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Curriculum



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Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Curriculum

The Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Curriculum is a lesson and activities that teach the proper procedure for handling a choking emergency.

Author



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Tackmann currently teaches middle school and high school physical education, as well as 7th and 8th grade health education, for the Fall Creek School District in Wisconsin. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of South Dakota, where she studied health education, physical education, adaptive physical education, dance, and coaching.

She later earned a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, with a concentration in pedagogy, methodology, and curriculum design focused on developing critical thinking skills and reducing adolescent risk behaviors.

Lesson Structure

Each lesson begins with a Lesson Overview, Lesson Objectives and a Lesson at a Glance table, which lists the lesson activities, materials required, suggested preparation steps, and approximate class time.

Lesson Sections

The actual lesson follows the overview, which will contain some of the sections described below.

FOCUS

Every lesson begins with a FOCUS activity intended to capture participants' attention. This may be in the form of a small or large class discussion, game, review of previous lesson information, or demonstration. During this activity, participants are introduced to the topic of the lesson.

LEARN

The LEARN activity in each lesson varies in its presentation mode. It may be a slide presentation, group activity, or demonstration.

REVIEW

The majority of lessons end with a REVIEW activity intended to briefly review the lesson's key messages or main points.

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures

Lesson Overview

Choking is often caused by food or other foreign objects becoming lodged in the throat and blocking the flow of air to the lungs. It can result in unconsciousness and cardiopulmonary arrest. Choking accounts for more than 3,000 deaths each year. It is the number one cause of infant death. The recognition and proper steps in a choking emergency can save the life of a child.

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify objects that can cause choking in an infant or toddler
- Explain why abdominal thrusts (the Heimlich maneuver) should not be used on an infant
- Explain and demonstrate the proper procedures a caregiver should administer in a choking emergency

Lesson at a Glance

Activity	Materials	Preparation	Approximate Class Time
FOCUS	• What's in the Bag? worksheet • Large paper bag, such as a grocery bag • 20 small objects/toys/foods, such as balloons, plastic bags, hard candy, paperclips, teddy bears with button eyes, coins, grapes, hot dog slices, nuts, popcorn, raw vegetables, batteries, and broken crayons Note: About half of the objects you gather should be unsafe for infants • Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency slide presentation	1. Print/photocopy the What in a Bag? Worksheet (one per participant). 2. Gather the 20 small objects and large bag. 3. Prepare to share the slide presentation.	10 minutes
LEARN	• Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency slide presentation • Choking Baby • Check Your Skills worksheet	1. Prepare to share the slide presentation. 2. Prepare the Choking Baby with the choking object. 3. Print/photocopy the Check Your Skills worksheet (one per participant).	30 minutes
REVIEW	• Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test • Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test – Answer Key	1. Print/photocopy the Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test (one per participant).	5 minutes

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures

FOCUS: Identifying Choking Hazards

10 minutes

Purpose:

This activity helps participants identify what might cause a choking emergency in an infant or toddler and how to prevent it.

Materials:

- What's in the Bag? worksheet
- Large paper bag, such as a grocery bag
- 20 small objects/toys/foods, such as balloons, plastic bags, hard candy, paperclips, teddy bears with button eyes, coins, grapes, hotdog slices, nuts, popcorn, raw vegetables, batteries, and broken crayons
- Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency slide presentation

Facilitation Steps:

1. Share the following background information as you see fit. Choking is often caused by food or other foreign objects becoming lodged in the throat and blocking the flow of air to the lungs.

It can result in unconsciousness and cardiopulmonary arrest. Choking accounts for more than 3,000 deaths each year. It is the number one cause of infant death.

The recognition and proper steps in a choking emergency can save the life of a child.

2. Distribute the What's in the Bag? worksheet.

3. Explain that infants like to put things into their mouths as they explore their world. Caregivers are responsible for ensuring that the environment is safe from choking emergencies. An airway obstruction emergency occurs when an object becomes lodged in the throat, restricting air from getting into the lungs.

If this happens, the caregiver must act immediately. If they do not react quickly, the infant's heart will stop and death will occur.

4. Explain to participants that you will show them a variety of small objects, and it is their job to determine whether each object is safe or unsafe for an infant or toddler under the age of four.

Instruct them to individually write their answers on their worksheet as each object is shown.

5. One at a time, quickly pull the 20 small objects out of the large paper bag, show them to the participants, and place each object on a table at the front of the classroom.
6. Lead a class discussion by asking participants which objects are safe, and which are unsafe. Ask participants to give evidence to justify their decisions.

Form two piles, safe and unsafe, and explain that the objects in the unsafe pile could cause choking and should never be placed within the reach of an infant or toddler.

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7. Brainstorm other objects that might be found in a home, daycare setting, or other environment that could be unsafe for an infant or toddler, putting them at risk of choking.

Tell participants that round items are especially dangerous because they can form a plug over the airway.

8. Display Slide 2 and summarize the discussion by pointing out the foods to avoid with infants 4-12 months. Foods to avoid with infants 4-12 months:
 - Avoid soft or sticky foods, such as marshmallows and peanut butter. They can get lodged in the throat. Peanut butter and other nut butters are difficult for an infant to swallow safely.
 - Avoid hard foods, such as nuts, popcorn, raisins, and other small, dried fruit or seeds. They are potential choking hazards.
 - Avoid large pieces of food. Be sure all food is no larger than the size of a pea. Do not give infants hard, uncooked vegetables, such as carrots, celery, or green beans. These should be diced, shredded, or cooked and cut up or mashed. Cut all fruits, such as grapes, melons, or berries into quarters before serving. Avoid hard fruits, such as apples. Cut meats and cheeses into very small pieces or shred them and give only one or two pieces as a time.

Name: _____

Date: _____

What's in the Bag?

Instructions: As your instructor quickly pulls objects out of the paper bag, determine whether each object is safe or unsafe for an infant or toddler under the age of four. Write your answers below, creating two lists, safe and unsafe, then explain why you made the decision you did.

Safe Objects:

Why do you think the object is safe?

- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ |
| 7. _____ | _____ |
| 8. _____ | _____ |
| 9. _____ | _____ |
| 10. _____ | _____ |

Unsafe Objects:

Why do you think the object is unsafe?

- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ |
| 7. _____ | _____ |
| 8. _____ | _____ |
| 9. _____ | _____ |
| 10. _____ | _____ |

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures

LEARN: Handling an Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency

30 minutes

Purpose:

This activity helps participants learn about, practice, and check their understanding of the proper procedures in handling an infant choking emergency.

Materials:

- Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency slide presentation, slides 3-9
- Choking Baby
- Check Your Skills worksheet

Facilitation Steps:

1. Insert the round ball into the Choking Baby's oral cavity so it falls into the back of the throat. Hold the Choking Baby upright so that the ball can settle into the throat, but do not force it or push it in manually. At this point, the Choking Baby is ready for proper technique demonstration and practice.

Use of proper technique coupled with the appropriate force will dislodge the object from the back of the throat.

2. Ask participants what they have heard about airway obstruction/choking emergencies and what procedure(s) they have heard about with these emergencies.

They will likely bring up the abdominal thrust (Heimlich maneuver).

- For those who may not know about abdominal thrusts, briefly explain the process: The Heimlich maneuver forces air pushed out of a person's lungs, making them cough. The force of the cough may help push the object out of the airway, allowing them to breathe.
- Explain that while the Heimlich maneuver works well with adults and children over one year of age, it should not be used on infants. Performing the Heimlich maneuver on infants less than a year old may cause harm to their body.

3. Display Slide 3 and discuss how to recognize a choking infant.
4. Display Slides 4-9 and demonstrate the steps in handling an infant airway obstruction emergency using the Choking Baby.

Explain that the skills demonstrated and practiced within this lesson will be peer-assessed.

Steps
1. If alone, shout for help: • If someone comes, have them call for emergency medical assistance • If no one comes, continue rescue skills for one minute and then call for emergency medical assistance
2. Hold the infant face down on your forearm, supporting their head and jaw with your hand. Keep the airway open by not letting the infant's head drop forward. Sit or kneel and rest your arm on your thigh, holding the infant's shoulders below their hips. Straddle the infant's legs on your arm.
3. Give up to five "back slaps" with the heel of your free hand between the infant's shoulder blades. Each slap should be slightly harder to help the obstruction dislodge.
4. If the object does not come out after five back slaps, turn the infant onto their back by holding the back of the infant's head with your free hand and flipping the infant to your free forearm, supporting the infant's head and neck with your hand.
1. Give up to five "chest thrusts" on the lower half of the breastbone using the heel of one hand, just below the nipple line. Press down $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the depth of the infant's chest (one second in length). Allow the chest to come back to normal position.
2. Alternate giving five back slaps and five chest thrusts until the object comes out; the infant breathes, coughs, or cries; or until the infant stops responding. If the infant stops responding and becomes unconscious or limp, perform the steps of infant CPR.

If this works, and the object comes out, call an emergency medical person, and let parents know what happened. The baby will still need to be checked for any damage or bruising from the procedure. Possible trauma to the airway could result in friction swelling of the airway. Possible aspiration if a particle got down into the lungs could result in pneumonia later.

5. Have participants form groups of 2-3 to practice the technique you modeled.
6. Give each participant a copy of the Check Your Skills worksheet and have them complete it as they work with their partner or group.
7. Explain that the one performing the procedure should not refer to the worksheet while completing the steps.
8. Have each pair/group work with the Choking Baby to complete the review assessment. Ensure that participants lodge the round ball into the airway passage completely before performing their steps.
9. Circle the room, helping and answering questions as necessary.

Consider assigning a number (1, 2, and 3) to each participant within the group such that 1 practices first while 2 and 3 observe and peer evaluate, and vice versa.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Check Your Skills

Instructions: Take turns with your partner demonstrating and assessing the rescue skills you learned. For example, one will demonstrate the steps to help a choking infant while the other checks off each step as it is performed. If any steps are missed or performed incorrectly, stop, explain the correct procedure, and practice the sequence of steps again.

Peer Evaluators: Be sure to add up the total points earned for the skill, make any comments and/or notes as needed, and sign at the conclusion of the demonstration.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
	1	2	3	4
1. If alone, shout for help: • If someone comes, have them call for emergency medical assistance • If no one comes, continue rescue skills for 1 minute, and then call for emergency medical assistance				
1. Hold the infant face down on your forearm, supporting the infant's head and jaw with your hand. Keep their airway open by not letting the infant's head drop forward. Sit or kneel and rest your arm on your right thigh, holding the infant's shoulders below their hips. Straddle the infant's legs on your arm.				
2. Give up to five "back slaps" with the heel of your free hand between the infant's shoulder blades. Each slap slightly harder to help the obstruction dislodge.				
3. If the object does not come out after five back slaps, turn the infant onto their back by holding the back of the infant's head with your free hand and flipping the infant to your free forearm, supporting the infant's head and neck with your hand.				
4. Give up to five "chest thrusts" on the lower half of the breastbone using the heel of one hand, just below the nipple line. Press down $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the depth of the infant's chest (one second in length). Allow the chest to come back to normal position.				
5. Alternate giving five "back slaps" and five "chest thrusts" until the object comes out or the infant breathes, coughs, cries, or stops responding. If the infant stops responding and becomes unconscious or limp, perform the steps of infant CPR.				

Total Points Earned: _____

Comments/Notes: _____

Peer Evaluator Signature: _____

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Lesson

REVIEW: Check Your Understanding

5 minutes

Purpose:

This activity assesses participants' understanding of the information presented.

Materials:

- Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test

Facilitation Steps:

1. Distribute the Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test to each participant and have them complete it.

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test

- For each of the following objects, indicate whether it is safe or unsafe for an infant by writing the correct letter in the space next to each object.

Object	Safe or Unsafe
___ marble	a. Safe
___ rattle	b. Unsafe
___ grape	
___ stuffed animal	
___ small Lego® piece	
___ hot dog cut into slices	
___ play money and coins	

- Order the steps of helping a choking infant by placing the correct number next to each step.

	Step
___	Give up to five “back slaps” with the heel of your free hand between the infant’s shoulder blades. Each slap slightly harder to help the obstruction dislodge.
___	Give up to five “chest thrusts” on the lower half of the breastbone using the heel of one hand, just below the nipple line. Press down $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the depth of the infant’s chest (one second in length). Allow the chest to come back to normal position.
___	If alone, shout for help: • If someone comes, have them call for emergency medical assistance • If no one comes, continue rescue skills for one minute, and then call for emergency medical assistance
___	Alternate giving five back slaps and five chest thrusts until the object comes out or the infant breathes, coughs, cries, or stops responding. If the infant stops responding and becomes unconscious or limp, perform the steps of infant CPR.
___	Hold the infant face down on your forearm, supporting the infant’s head and jaw with your hand. Keep their airway open by not letting the infant’s head drop forward. Sit or kneel and rest your arm on your right thigh, holding the infant’s shoulders below their hips. Straddle the infant’s legs on your arm.
___	If the object does not come out after five back slaps, turn the infant onto their back by holding the back of the infant’s head with your free hand and flipping the infant to your free forearm, supporting the infant’s head and neck with your hand.

- Why should abdominal thrusts (the Heimlich maneuver) not be used on an infant? Circle the correct answer.
 - It may cause harm to the infant’s body
 - It doesn’t work
 - The baby will cry
 - It will cause the object to go further into the airway

Infant Airway Obstruction Emergency Procedures Test – Answer Key

1. For each of the following objects, indicate whether it is safe or unsafe for an infant by writing the correct letter in the space next to each object.

Object	Safe or Unsafe
<u> b </u> marble	a. Safe
<u> a </u> rattle	b. Unsafe
<u> b </u> grape	
<u> a </u> stuffed animal	
<u> b </u> small Lego piece	
<u> b </u> hot dog cut into slices	
<u> b </u> play money and coins	

2. Order the steps of helping a choking infant by placing the correct number next to each step.

	Step
<u> 3 </u>	Give up to five “back slaps” with the heel of your free hand between the infant’s shoulder blades. Each slap slightly harder to help the obstruction dislodge.
<u> 5 </u>	Give up to five “chest thrusts” on the lower half of the breastbone using the heel of one hand, just below the nipple line. Press down $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the depth of the infant’s chest (one second in length). Allow the chest to come back to normal position.
<u> 1 </u>	If alone, shout for help: • If someone comes, have them call for emergency medical assistance • If no one comes, continue rescue skills for one minute, and then call for emergency medical assistance
<u> 6 </u>	Alternate giving five back slaps and five chest thrusts until the object comes out or the infant breathes, coughs, cries, or stops responding. If the infant stops responding and becomes unconscious or limp, perform the steps of infant CPR.
<u> 2 </u>	Hold the infant face down on your forearm, supporting the infant’s head and jaw with your hand. Keep their airway open by not letting the infant’s head drop forward. Sit or kneel and rest your arm on your right thigh, holding the infant’s shoulders below their hips. Straddle the infant’s legs on your arm.
<u> 4 </u>	If the object does not come out after five back slaps, turn the infant onto their back by holding the back of the infant’s head with your free hand and flipping the infant to your free forearm, supporting the infant’s head and neck with your hand.

3. Why should abdominal thrusts (the Heimlich maneuver) not be used on an infant? Circle the answer.
- It may cause harm to the infant’s body**
 - It doesn’t work
 - The baby will cry
 - It will cause the object to go further into the airway

Sources

American Heart Association. (2025). Infant foreign-body airway obstruction algorithm. American Heart Association CPR & First Aid. https://cpr.heart.org/-/media/CPR-Files/CPR-Guidelines-Files/2025-Algorithms/Algorithm-BLS-Infant-FBAO.pdf?sc_lang=en