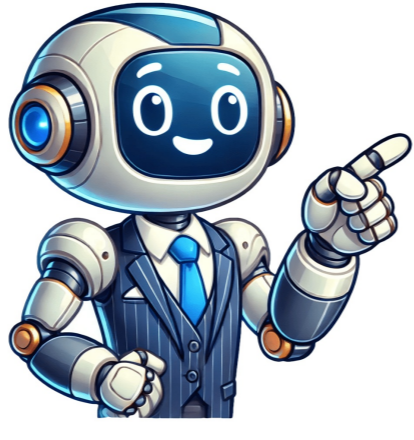


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What would you do if you are far away from professional medical help and you came across someone who had a gunshot wound?What if emergency responders are delayed? For example, what if you're caught in a riot and there's so much chaos that no one notices that someone was shot?Here's what you could do if you do not have access to professional medical facilities.In order to do this you need to apply:Direct pressureElevate the part of the body affected (don't elevate if shot in the abdomen as it can increase blood flow)Use a pressure bandageThis usually works for most extremities. If it's a gunshot, the person will not be able to survive very long unless they get medical treatment quickly.Cover the victim for warmth. Keep covered unless there's a reason not to, such as you're checking for wounds. Hypothermia can be an overlooked danger especially if you are in the backcountry or exposed to the elements. Unless it's hot where you are or the person is well clothed and dry, cover them with a blanket or coat.Scan the body. Sometimes the bullet can hit a bone, break into fragments, and stray anywhere in the body.You can't just depend on looking for an entry and exit wound as some types of bullets can cause multiple injuries.Remember: Call 911 Immediately, if it's not possible get the victim to the hospital as soon as possible.In addition to acting on the initial treatment, here's what to do if emergency help was not on the way.Keep the person flat (in most cases). Bleeding can cause blood pressure to plummet (that's called going into shock), which can dangerously reduce blood flow to the brain.Ensure a good airway. If the person were unconscious, place them on their side to keep the tongue from blocking the airway. If placing on the side were impossible or I suspected a neck injury, do a jaw jut: place fingers behind each side of the person's jaw and jut it forward, without moving the head. Someone would have to hold it that way.Some experts have suggested, if nothing else, pulling the tongue forward and safely pinning it to the lower lip.When you've finished addressing the immediate life-threatening problems, then you can work on preventing infection. In most scenarios, you won't need to worry about this unless help is at least a few hours away.Irrigate the wounds with drinkable water.Apply antibiotic ointment or honey if you have it.Apply a dressing.Give oral antibiotics if you have them and the person is conscious. Bullet wounds are dirty wounds.Don't close the wounds. Even if you know how to close a wound with sutures or tape, you shouldn't close puncture wounds or bullet wounds, for two reasons: Bleeding could start up again without you knowing it, and closing a puncture or gaping wound just makes a perfect place for bacteria to grow and cause a bad infection.Don't discount flesh wounds. If it's only a flesh wound, great meaning that the bullet didn't go into the abdominal, chest, or head cavity. If a bullet goes in an arm or leg and out the other side that generally is a good sign. A clean shot, meaning a clean entry and exit wound is better than not. But there are blood vessels and bones in those areas. Look for bleeding, quick swelling (which may be from bleeding), or signs of a broken bone, and treat according.An acronym that makes things a bit easier to remember.M - Massive hemorrhage - Look for massive bleeding, as this is the greatest danger. An adult who has lost two liters of blood probably will not recover. So you have to stop it before then.A - Airway - Are they able to breathe? If they can talk, they can breathe.R - Respiration - How are they breathing? Get a good idea of how fast and deep they are breathing so that you have a baseline to see any change.C - Circulation - How high is their pulse (not an exact number, just an idea)? How are their skin tone and temperature? Are they clammy, damp, dry, ashen, or blue? If you can feel their pulse at the wrist, they have a systolic blood pressure of 80-90. This is good enough. If you can't feel it there, but can feel it at the carotid artery (the neck) it is 60-70. At this point, they are at risk of losing too much blood.Get the victim to medical treatment ASAP. There are all sorts of things that can go wrong. For one thing, if the bleeding won't stop, surgery may be the only treatment that helps. Also, they may need blood transfusions. Neither of these is an option outside a medical facility. –References1]National model EMS clinical guidelines. 2]The first aid and hospital treatment of gunshot and blast injuries. 3]Tactical Combat Casualty Care Handbook, Version 5. by Roman Poberezhnik/UnsplashThis post may contain affiliate links. If you make a purchase using links on our site, we may earn a commission at no extra cost to you. First aidHospital treatmentComplicationsRecoveryFatality ratesOutlookIf a person is shot, they need prompt emergency medical attention. After getting safety and contacting emergency services, you can slow the bleeding by applying pressure to help arteries constrict. Gunshot wounds are always a medical emergency. The extent of injuries depends on several factors, such as where someone is shot, the size of the bullets, and the type of gun someone has been shot with. It's critical to call 911 or your local emergency services as soon as safe to do so. Administering first aid can save a person's life while you wait for an ambulance to arrive. Actively looking for help bleeding and preventing life-threatening complications. Keep reading to learn essential information about first aid, medical treatment, and recovery from gunshot wounds.More people experience nonfatal gunshot wounds than fatal ones, according to the CDC. It's crucial to identify where someone's been shot and begin first aid while waiting on emergency services.The first 10 minutes after the injury are often referred to as the platinum 10 minutes. During this time, the person who was shot is at risk of life-threatening complications, such as airway obstructiontension pneumothorax (collapsed lung)bleedingThe leading cause of death in gunshot wounds is bleeding, per 2017 research. According to the American Red Cross, a person can die from severe bleeding in fewer than 5 minutes if untreated.Here's what you can do if you're with somebody who is shot. If you're with somebody who has been shot, it's crucial that you and the person get to a safe place away from the threat. In the case of an accidental shooting, this might mean making sure the gun's safety is on and that the gun is secured. In the case of an intentional shooting, this might mean evacuating the scene.If you are with an injured person during an active shooter situation, evacuation may not be an option. In this case, the Department of Homeland Security recommends that you attempt tohide in a place that's out of the shooter's sightUse your phone to avoid detection and remain as quiet as possibleseek an area with a barrier for protection (such as behind a locked office door or a large object)block a shooter's potential entry with a barricade, such as stacking furnitureavoid restricting your ability to move in case you need to run or confrontGunshot wounds always need medical attention to assess their severity and begin treatment. It's critical that you call 911 or local emergency services as soon as is safe and possible.The quicker a person who has been shot gets to the hospital, the better their chances of surviving. Ideally, they should receive medical attention in the platinum 10 minutes. Check if the person you're with is awake and responsive. This involves the r-spout-tap method. Verbally address the person ("Are you okay?" or "Can you hear me?"), followed by firm tap to their body, and another verbal cue. The Red Cross recommends trying this approach for 10 seconds or fewer.Bleeding is the leading cause of death in people with gunshot wounds. It's important to apply firm pressure to the wound if the person is bleeding profusely. If they have a large wound, cover the wound with any clean cloth available, such as a piece of clothing. Press down as hard as you can until EMTs arrive to relieve you. It may also be necessary to use a tourniquet to limit blood loss while waiting to get someone to a hospital. While research is still preliminary, a 2021 study suggests commercially made tourniquets may be able to better control hemorrhage from appendages (arms or legs), reduce the chance of the person needing a blood transfusion, and increase overall likelihood of survival. These types of tourniquets are pre-made, widely available to order (especially online), and can be added to emergency preparedness kits.If you are with someone who has been shot and do not have access to a ready-made tourniquet, you can still improvise one. Tourniquets should be used as a first resort when an arm or leg wound is bleeding so much that direct pressure does not stop blood flow. Wrap and tie a long piece of fabric (such as a shirt or necktie) several inches above the wound as tightly as possible. This is intended to limit arterial blood flow and reduce blood loss.A homemade tourniquet will never be as effective as a commercially made one, but it can still be a significant first aid tool.If a person who has been shot is responsive and fully awake and doesn't seem to have life-threatening injuries, try to collect as much information from them as you can while waiting for an ambulance. This applies to situations in which you are able to safely make noise, not around an active shooter.Ask the person who has been shot about any symptoms they are feeling and what allergies, medications, and preexisting medical conditions they may have. Ask about or identify any medical tags they may be wearing. Some people have their medical ID on their larger ones, this could reduce death rates due to gun violence by nearly 40%.While survival rates have remained somewhat stable, deaths due to gun violence have risen in recent years. The number of gun-related deaths increased by 13.9% from 2020 to 2019. Gunshot wounds were among the top causes of death for people ages 18 to 44 in the United States in 2020.Gunshot wounds always require immediate medical attention. First aid for gunshot wounds starts with getting the injured person and yourself to safety and calling 911 or local emergency services. Check to see if the person is awake and responsive, and collect identifying information from them. Use a clean cloth and apply as much pressure as possible to stop bleeding until relieved by emergency personnel. If the person is bleeding a lot from an arm or leg, try to apply a commercial or homemade tourniquet. CPR or the use of an automated external defibrillator may also be necessary.Many types of surgeries and other medical treatments are used to treat gunshot wounds. Recovering from being shot may require a hospital stay of days, weeks, or longer. After discharge, a person who is healing a gunshot wound may need medication, physical therapy, and in some cases, further surgery. Emotional and psychological trauma is common in both shooting witnesses and survivors. It's important both physical and mental needs are addressed during recovery.Overall, recovery from a gunshot wound varies substantially depending on the extent and location of injuries. A doctor or care team will work to create a fuller picture of a recovery plan and what to expect at each stage.Healthline has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical journals and associations. We only use quality, credible sources to ensure content accuracy and integrity. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our editorial policy.Active shooter: How to respond. (2008). external defibrillators (AEDs). (2022). AA, et al. (2021). 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Predicting survival after acute civilian penetrating brain injuries. model EMS clinical guidelines. (2019). M, et al. (2022). Single dose IV antibiotic for low-energy extremity gunshot wounds. A, et al. (2022). Trends of emergency department visits for gunshot victims in the United States. topics: Guns. (2022). (2022). the bleed: Applying a tourniquet. (2018). ZHEH, et al. (2016). Spine gunshot wounds at the central military hospital in Mexico. prevention. (2022). Establish that you are in a safe position. If the victim was shot unintentionally (such as while hunting), make sure that the firearm is pointed away from others, cleared of ammo, safe, and secured. If the victim was shot in a crime, verify that the shooter is no longer on the scene and that both you and the victim are safe. Wear personal protective equipment, such as latex gloves, if available.[1] If there's an active shooter, run and hide. Only help with casualties when it's safe to do so.[2] Call for help. Dial 911 for emergency medical assistance and follow the dispatcher's instructions.[3] The dispatcher can help you stop the bleeding and walk through the rest of the steps if no one else is available to help.[4] Ideally, the injured person should be inside an ambulance within 10 minutes of getting shot.[5] Avoid moving the victim if they were shot in the neck or back. This can damage the spinal cord and cause permanent paralysis. In addition, avoid elevating their legs—this can cause abdominal and chest wounds to bleed quickly and make it harder for the person to breathe.[6] Act quickly. Time is your enemy in treating the victim—the average time for someone to bleed out after experiencing trauma from an injury is only 3 to 5 minutes.[7] Try to keep your movements swift without making the person feel more upset or panicked. Apply direct pressure to control bleeding. Identify the source of the bleeding and remove any clothing blocking the area.[8] If there's no trauma first aid kit available, take a clean cloth and press directly against the wound using the palm of your hand, an elbow, or a knee—whatever it takes to stop the hemorrhage.[9] Add new bandages over the old; do not remove bandages when they become soaked. If there is a first aid kit available, pack the wound with bleeding control gauze, any gauze, or a clean cloth. Apply steady direct pressure with the palm of your hand.[10] Apply dressing to a leg or arm wound. If a tourniquet is not available or does not stop the bleeding, pack the wound with a clean cloth or gauze. Apply pressure with both hands and use a cloth, shirt, or whatever is at hand to press into the wound.[11] There is little you can do for torso wounds outside of a hospital—just keep steady pressure and direct emergency responders to the victim when they arrive. Be prepared to treat the victim for shock. Gunshot wounds can lead to shock, a condition caused by trauma or blood loss. Expect that a gunshot victim will show signs of shock and treat them accordingly by making sure the victim's body temperature remains consistent— cover the person so that they does not get cold. Loosen tight clothing and drape him in a blanket or coat.[12] Typically you would want to elevate the legs of someone experiencing shock, but refrain from doing so if they might have a spinal injury or a wound in the torso.[13] Don't let the person eat or drink anything—not even water.[14] Give reassurance. Tell the person that she's okay and that you're helping. Reassurance is important. Ask the person to talk to you. Keep the person warm. If possible, ask the person about any medications she is taking, any medical conditions (i.e. diabetes, hypertension), and any drug allergies she may have. This is important information and may distract her from her wound. Stay with the person. Continue to reassure and keep the victim warm. Wait for the authorities. If the blood coagulates around the bullet wound, do not remove blood mats on wound, as this may be limiting blood loss. 1 Remember the A, B, C, D, E's. For advanced treatment it is important to consider the status of the person. A, B, C, D, E. It is an easy way to remember the important factors you should consider. Assess these five critical factors to see what sort of assistance the victim requires.[15] 2 Check the airway. If the person is talking, his airway is probably clear. If the person is unconscious, check to make sure that his airway is not obstructed. If it is and there is no spine injury, tilt their head and lift their chin.[16] Apply gentle pressure to the forehead with the palm of one hand. Placing the other hand under the chin and use it to tilt the head back. 3 Monitor breathing. Is the victim taking regular breaths? Can you see her chest rising and falling? If the victim is not breathing, start CPR immediately.[17] If the person doesn't have a pulse, CPR would not be effective.[18] 4 Check circulation. Apply pressure to any bleeding, then check the victim's pulse at the wrist or throat. Does the victim have a discernible pulse? If not, begin CPR.[19] Control any major bleeding. 5 Look for a disability. Disability refers to damage to the spinal cord or neck. Check to see if the victim can move his hands and feet. If not, there may be an injury to the spinal cord.[20] Look for compound or obvious fractures, dislocations, or anything that looks out of place or unnatural. If the victim shows signs of disability, you should refrain from moving them. 6 Check for exposure. Check the victim as thoroughly as possible for other wounds that you may be unaware of. Pay special attention to the armpit, buttocks or other difficult-to-see areas. Avoid completely undressing the victim before emergency help arrives as this may increase heat loss and shock.[21] Advertisement 1 Apply direct pressure to the wound. Carefully assess the situation to determine that there is no sign of disability or any wounds that would suggest the victim sustained a spinal injury. If this is the case, elevate the limb above the heart to reduce bleeding.[22] Expose the wound and apply constant direct pressure using gauze or a clean cloth.[23] If pressure on a leg or arm wound does not stop the bleeding and the dressing is soaked with blood, you will need to apply a tourniquet.[24] 2 Apply indirect pressure if the bleeding doesn't stop. In addition to direct pressure, apply indirect pressure between the bleeding site and the heart to limit the blood flow to the wound.[25] This is done by putting pressure on arteries or, as they are sometimes called, pressure points, for a maximum of 10 minutes. They will feel like particularly large and hard veins. Applying pressure to them will constrict blood flow when direct pressure and elevation are ineffective. [26] To slow blood flow to the arm, use 2 fingers to press on the brachial artery on the inner side of the arm, just below the armpit. For groin or thigh injuries, apply pressure to the femoral artery, between the groin and the upper thigh. This one is particularly large. You will have to use the entire heel of your hand to reduce circulation. For lower leg wounds, apply pressure to the popliteal artery, behind the knee. 3 Make a tourniquet. Tourniquets can stop deadly blood loss for several hours without causing harm.[27] If the bleeding is extremely severe and you have a tourniquet on hand, use it. If you only have a bandage or fabric on hand, you can make a tourniquet. Wrap bandage tightly around the limb, between the wound and the heart, 5 to 7 centimeters above the wound. Wrap around limb several times and tie a knot. Leave enough fabric to tie a second knot around a stick. Twist stick until the bleeding stops.[28] Write down the time the tourniquet was applied—leaving a tourniquet on too long can cause damage to the tissue, and a time-stamp can let caregivers know which patients to treat first.[29] Advertisement 1 Recognize a sucking chest wound. If a bullet has penetrated the chest, it is possible that a sucking chest wound exists. Air is coming in through the wound, but not coming out, collapsing the lung. Signs of a sucking chest wound include a sucking sound emanating from the chest, coughing up blood, frothy blood coming from the wound, and shortness of breath. When in doubt, treat the wound as a sucking chest wound. 2 Find and expose the wound. Look for the wound. Remove clothes from the wound. If some fabric is stuck to the wound, cut around it. Place a gloved hand or press a clean cloth over the wound.[30] Determine if there is an exit wound and if so, apply procedure to the exit wound as well.[31] 3 Seal the wound on three sides. Take a plastic wrap or bag or gauze pads covered in petroleum jelly and tape the dressing around the wound, covering 3 sides.[32] As you seal the wound, encourage the patient to exhale forcefully 3 times while holding their breath. This will force all air out of the lungs. After they exhale, tape the fourth side of the dressing.[33] If the patient has shortness of breath or labored breathing after the wound has been sealed, "burp" the wound by removing the seal and asking them to breathe out as if they're blowing out the candles on a birthday cake.[34] Reseal the wound. 4 Apply direct pressure to both sides of the wound.[35] It is possible to do this with two pads over each wound, held very tightly in place by a wrapped bandage. 5 Carefully monitor the patient's breathing. You can do this by talking to the conscious patient, or watching the chest rise and fall.[36] If the patient stops breathing, reduce pressure on the wound to allow the chest to rise and fall.[37] Prepare to perform CPR if their heart stops beating.[38] 6 Do not release pressure or remove the seal when medical assistance arrives.[39] They will either use your seal or replace it with a better one. Advertisement Add New Question Question Can the wounds be cleaned with water? Or should I use peroxide? Jonas DeMuro, MD Board Certified Critical Care Surgeon Dr. DeMuro is a board certified Pediatric Critical Care Surgeon in New York. He received his MD from Stony Brook University School of Medicine in 1996. He completed his fellowship in Surgical Critical Care at North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System and was a previous American College of Surgeons (ACS) Fellow. Any bullet wound should be seen immediately, as this is a medical emergency. Any delay easily means the difference between life and death in many cases. It is fine to apply pressure (with appropriate safety precautions, including gloves and eye/mouth protection) while waiting for the ambulance to arrive after calling 9-1-1. Question How can I treat non-fatal headshots? Danielle Jacks, MD Cardiothoracic Surgeon Danielle Jacks, MD is a Cardiothoracic Surgeon at Asante Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons in Medford, Oregon. She has over seven years of experience in general surgery, and completed her surgical residency in 2021. In 2023, she completed a fellowship in Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Ochsner Clinic Foundation in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her MD from Oregon Health and Science University in 2016. A gunshot to the head always needs to be treated at a hospital, even if it didn't enter the skull. It's still possible that the person's skull is fractured or that there's bleeding inside the person's brain. Get emergency medical care at a hospital. Ask a Question Advertisement Thanks Thanks Show More Tips Advertisement This article was medically reviewed by Danielle Jacks, MD and by wikiHow staff writer, Cheyenne Main. Danielle Jacks, MD is a Cardiothoracic Surgeon at Asante Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeons in Medford, Oregon. She has over seven years of experience in general surgery, and completed her surgical residency in 2021. In 2023, she completed a fellowship in Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Ochsner Clinic Foundation in New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her MD from Oregon Health and Science University in 2016. This article has been viewed 1,004,214 times. Co-authors: 77 Updated: April 24, 2025 Views: 1,004,214 Categories: Featured Articles | Wound First Aid Medical Disclaimer The content of this article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, examination, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always contact your doctor or other qualified healthcare professional before starting, changing, or stopping any kind of health treatment. Print Send fan mail to authors Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 1,004,214 times. "This article showed me that if anything bad happens I should stay calm and work swiftly. I've known how to apply pressure and I hope I can help if someone is injured. I want to go into the medical field when I'm older. I'm only 12 and I want to be able to save people. I've had dreams about me saving people and this article has shown me how. Thanks...". – more Share your story What would you do if you are far away from professional medical help and you came across someone who had a gunshot wound?What if emergency responders are delayed? 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