

CPR/AED and First Aid Training Options

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Getting Started

To start with, everyone should have a current CPR/AED certification:

CPR/AED – CPR/AED is cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator training. In 2 to 3 hours you can learn these critical skills that can save someone's life. If someone's heart stops CPR maintains the flow of blood and oxygen throughout their body until they can be revived. CPR does not typically revive a person but dramatically improves the chances of them being revived through subsequent treatment. AED on the other can revive someone whose heart has stopped and today AEDs are available in schools, airports, police and fire stations and many other public buildings. Modern AEDs talk you through the whole procedure and are very easy to use. Training will give you an opportunity to use an AED in a low stress situation so you know what to do when you need one. CPR/AED certification is good for 2 years.

Next Steps

Once you are CPR/AED certified or even at the same time we recommend some type of first aid training. The main options are:

Basic First Aid (BFA) – BFA (sometimes also called Standard First Aid) will teach you how to stabilize an injured person until they can be transported to an emergency treatment facility. Along with CPR/AED I believe this is a minimum level of training everyone should have. BFA typically covers how to stop bleeding, deal with burns and medical emergencies. A BFA course can typically be completed along with CPR/AED training in around 5 hours.

Wilderness First Aid (WFA) – BFA courses are built around the premise that the emergency response system (EMS) can get a rescue squad or ambulance to your location in 15 to 30 minutes. The focus of the course is therefore typically on short term stabilization. For people who hike, camp or boat and are away from easy access by EMS, longer term care training is needed. Even in an urban setting a blizzard, hurricane, or other disaster could dramatically lengthen the EMS response time. WFA is designed to train you in how to care for someone for hours or even days. Typically a WFA course is taught over 2 to 3 days and requires 16 to 20 hours to complete. WFA certification requires a written exam and is good for 2 years.

Wilderness First Responder (WFR) – WFR is the next level of training beyond WFA. A WFR course is much more in depth in dealing with medical emergencies and longer term care. A WFR course is typically taught over 9 to 14 days and requires around 80 hours to complete. WFR certification requires a written exam, a practical exam and is good for 3 years.

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) – EMT is an even higher level of training requiring 120 to 160 hours to complete. EMTs must be associated with an organization such as a fire department or ambulance service and are the medical technicians you will typically see on ambulances. EMTs must pass a state certification exam. There is also a variant of an EMT called a Wilderness EMT (WEMT) who has special training for dealing with wilderness emergencies.

Paramedic – A paramedic is someone who has completed training to be an EMT and then continued on with additional training. A Paramedic program is very rigorous and is similar to a two year college

degree. Paramedics can administer IVs, medication, injections and advanced life support. A paramedic also has to pass a rigorous state exam to be licensed.

Resources and recommendations

Personally I had taken Red Cross BFA and CPR many years ago but didn't really feel prepared. In November of 2011 I took CPR/AED and WFA training and I really liked it, but I still wanted to know more. In January of 2012 I took WFR training. Since January 2012 I recertified my CPR/AED (here in Georgetown with Summit First Aid) and recertified my WFR at UMass Lowell.

Summit First Aid offers CPR/AED and WFA courses and the Georgetown Fire Department also offers CPR/AED courses and possibly first aid, all right here in Georgetown, MA. WFR courses are taught every January at UMass Lowell's campus rec center. EMT and Paramedic courses are offered through several local colleges.

What level of training is right for you will depend on the types of activities you engage in and how much time and money you are willing to devote to training.

Good luck!