

# The Difference Between Medical Treatment and First Aid Injuries

## The Problem

Some people are confused about how they should record a work injury if a worker is sent to a doctor as a precaution only, but it turns out the worker is okay, or if only minor first aid is administered by the doctor e.g. applying a bandage or cold compress.

These terms are not defined in the (very old) Australian Standard AS1885 entitled Workplace Injury and Disease Recording Standard. This fact sheet provides practical distinctions between medical treatment injury (MTI) and first aid injury (FAI).



## Legal Definition of Medical Treatment

The *Victorian Medical Treatment Act 1988* defines medical treatment as the carrying out of:

- a) An operation;
- b) Administration of a drug or other like substance (i.e. prescription medicine) or
- c) A medical procedure.

**Medical treatment does not include procedures carried out for diagnostic purposes only e.g. X-ray, observation or blood tests.**

## Examples of Medical Treatment Injury

Medical treatment by a doctor beyond first aid includes treatments such as:

- a) Stitches, sutures (including butterfly adhesive dressing in lieu of sutures);
- b) Removal of dead tissue or skin (surgical debridement);
- c) Treatment of infection;
- d) Application of antiseptic during a second or subsequent visit to medical personnel;
- e) Removal of foreign objects embedded in an eye;
- f) Removal of foreign objects embedded in a wound (beyond small splinters);
- g) Treatment of deep tissue burns e.g. second or third degree;
- h) Use of hot or cold soaking therapy or heat therapy during the second or subsequent visit to medical personnel;
- i) Positive x-ray diagnosis of fractures, broken bones and etc; or
- j) Admission to hospital or equivalent medical facility for medical treatment.

## First Aid Injury (FAI)

First aid is an initial, single treatment given to a worker within the scope of approved first aider training and typically includes:

- a) Treatment of minor (first degree) burns;
- b) Application of bandages (including elastic bandages) during a first visit to medical personnel;
- c) Irrigation of eye injuries and removal of non-embedded objects;
- d) Removal of foreign bodies from a wound using tweezers or other simple first aid technique;
- e) Use of non-prescription medication
- f) Soaking, application of hot-cold compresses, and use of elastic bandage on sprains immediately after injury (initial treatment only);
- g) Application of ointments for abrasions to prevent drying or cracking;
- h) Observations of injury during visits to medical personnel, including hospitalisation (for less than 48 hours) for observation only for a blow to the head or abdomen, or exposure to toxic substances;
  - + Diagnostic measures including: X-ray examination with a negative diagnosis (will be 'MTI' if positive);
  - + Physical examination, if no condition is identified or medical treatment is not administered; and
  - + One-time dose of prescribed medication, for example a Tetanus Injection or Pharmaceutical.

## Conclusions

Medical treatment involves treatment by a qualified medical practitioner beyond the scope of first aid.

Therefore, organisations that act cautiously and send a worker to a doctor or hospital as a precaution are not disadvantaged statistically if no treatment is required or only first aid administered by the doctor e.g. cold compress.

### Medical treatment by a qualified medical practitioner beyond first aid

Cautionary action that does not result in medical treatment beyond first aid should be recorded as a first aid injury, even though the worker was sent to a medical practitioner.

#### References:

1. Guide to Incident Notification, Worksafe Victoria.
2. Injury Classification Guidelines, Curtin University.
3. AS 1885.1-1990 Workplace Injury and Disease Recording Standard