

Certification Standards for the Wilderness First Responder: Minimum Guidelines & Scope of Practice

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Introduction

The Wilderness Medicine Education Collaborative ([WMEC](#)) was formed in 2010 to provide a forum for discussing trends and issues in wilderness medicine and to develop consensus-driven scope of practice documents for Wilderness First Aid (WFA), Wilderness Advanced First Aid (WAFA), and Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certifications. In 2022, the WMEC expanded its work to include related white papers and position statements. Our mission is to elevate wilderness medicine education and set standards for common field certifications. Collectively, the WMEC schools have over two hundred years of experience teaching wilderness medicine and have trained over 750,000 students in the past four decades.

The WFR course is designed for people who live, work, travel, and recreate outdoors. WFR graduates often care for patients in remote locations, in challenging weather, and with limited equipment. In some cases, WFRs are too remote or lack the technological equipment to be able to communicate with more advanced providers or rescue personnel. WFRs are typically incidental providers of medical care who perform that role secondary to their involvement in wilderness programming or outdoor recreation. WFR graduates often care for patients for prolonged periods due to delayed medical or rescue support and may need to make independent decisions regarding the need for and urgency of evacuation and required additional resources. These requirements generally differ from the scope of first responders in a front-country environment. Over time, course content has evolved based on the growing body of medical literature on first aid and wilderness medicine and our experience as practitioners and educators of wilderness medicine. This process has led to a consensus about content and scope of practice (SOP) for wilderness medicine certification within the recreational and professional outdoor industry. For more information about certification, licensure, curriculum, scope of practice, and accreditation and why the WMEC SOP documents provide practical standards for industry-wide medical certifications, view this [document](#).

This document and its companion documents—Minimum Guidelines and Scope of Practice for Wilderness First Aid, and Wilderness Advanced First Aid—are intended to set clear standards for wilderness medicine certification for the outdoor industry. We recommend the recreational public, outdoor program administrators, and other consumers of wilderness medicine courses refer to these documents and recommendations when choosing an appropriate course and credential level for themselves, their program, or their service. Users may also compare the SOP to the course curriculum to ensure the course meets these minimum standards. Because the needs of students and organizations vary by location, population, and experience, some educational institutions may choose to exceed these SOPs. While schools that teach wilderness medicine are not legally bound to conform to these standards, they have a professional obligation to consider them. Failing to follow an industry standard may dilute the quality and value of the WFR certification, compromise the care of wilderness participants, and leave the wilderness medicine provider, outdoor program or organization, and its graduates open to a lawsuit.

While the educational approach to meeting the SOPs is left to the discretion of the course provider, we recommend that instructors who teach wilderness medicine are skilled educators and medical providers who utilize hands-on practice, case studies, and realistic simulations as the prominent delivery style for their courses. This document is not a curriculum. Detailed information on the topics, including signs and

symptoms, can be found in the first aid and wilderness medicine literature. Neither the WMEC nor the approving parties are legally responsible for a loss arising from the use or misuse of this document by a WFR provider. Outdoor programs may benefit from working with a medical advisor to identify any predisposing terrain, environmental, and clinical conditions that may contribute to program-related accidents, injuries, and illnesses and suggest risk management strategies designed to prevent them. For more information on medical advisors, standing orders, and protocols view this [document](#).

Focus and Content Overview

The WMEC recommends that WFR courses cover the Core Topics for a minimum of 70 hours of class time. They can be taught entirely in-person or in a hybrid learning format where a minimum of 45 hours are taught in-person that focus on hands-on, practical skills, and simulations. Supplemental Elective Topics should require additional course hours. We do not recommend WFR or WFR recertification courses that are taught entirely online (e.g. synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination of each). WFR graduates must be certified in adult and child CPR and AED use based on the American Heart Association (AHA) or International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (ILCOR) guidelines and their skills practiced and verified through in-person training. The WMEC believes that the in-person hours of the WFR course are an essential element of each training. For more information about in-person versus online only, view this [document](#).

The scope of practice for a WFR is to prevent and identify medical problems, initiate reasonable and prudent field management, and identify signs and symptoms necessitating evacuation for potentially life-threatening problems.

The SOP is subdivided into core and elective skills and topics. Core skills and topics define the scope of practice of a WFR, while elective skills and topics are supplementary and designed to meet the needs of a specific audience. The SOP focuses on the following proficiencies:

- Rescuer and patient safety and protection, a basic physical exam to identify apparent injuries or abnormalities, assessing signs, symptoms, and vital sign patterns, and obtaining a relevant patient history.
- Prevention of medical problems anticipated by the activity and environment.
- Recognition of environmental conditions that may lead to problems and taking steps to mitigate the environmental challenge.
- Stabilizing emergencies, initiation of specific and appropriate medical treatments (e.g., splints, wound care, spine injury management, managing environmental threats, etc.), and assisting patients with their medications.
- Informed decisions regarding the need and urgency of an evacuation.

Treatment & Evacuation

We recommend treatment guidelines and evacuation parameters based on injuries and illness. Responders/rescuers must conduct a risk/benefit analysis carefully weighing the risks to all parties involved in the treatment and evacuation of the patient(s)—patients, rescuers, EMS, SAR, institutional or organizational capabilities, etc. Due to the dynamic nature of the wilderness environment and the unique variables of each situation, some treatments may not be available and a prompt evacuation may not be a viable option. In the SOP, we provide a generic recommendation to assess the need and urgency of the evacuation. In general, we recommend an urgent evacuation for all potentially life-threatening problems. However, we understand that in some cases, the associated risk may be too high to attempt an evacuation, or an evacuation is not possible.

Student Evaluation

To receive certification, students must demonstrate mastery of core topics and practical skills via in-person practical-skill testing and simulations.

WFR certifications must be renewed every two to three years via an in-person or hybrid renewal/recertification course containing a minimum of 16 in-person hours focusing on practical skills, case studies, and simulations.

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Core Topics

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Core Skills

Core Basic Life Support Skills

[Manually open airway and suction](#)
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Core Secondary Survey Skills

[Count pulse rate \(HR\) at radial artery](#)
[Count respirations \(RR\) and note quality](#)
[Assess skin condition](#)
[Assess mental status/LOR](#)
[Take SAMPLE history](#)
[Complete head-to-toe physical exam](#)
[Complete patient SOAP notes](#)

Core Spine Management Skills

[Know how to conduct a FSA](#)
[Know how to move spine-injured patients](#)
[Know how to protect spine-injured patients](#)
[Know how to package spine-injured patients](#)

Core Musculoskeletal Treatment Skills

[Reduce shoulder, patella, & digit dislocations](#)
[Splint long bone and joint injuries](#)

Core Hypothermia Treatment Skills

[Improvise a hypothermia wrap](#)

Core Anaphylaxis Treatment Skills

[Use an epinephrine auto-injector](#)

Elective Topics

[SAR Fundamentals](#)

[Behavioral Health/Mental Health Emergencies](#)

[Psychological First Aid](#)

[Scuba Diving Injuries](#)

[Marine Toxins/Envenomations](#)

[Emergency Childbirth](#)

Elective Skills

Elective Basic Life Support Skills

[Deliver medical oxygen](#)

[Perform infant CPR and AED](#)

[Airway management devices](#)

Elective Secondary Survey Skills

[Measure Blood Pressure \(BP\)](#)

[Measure pulse oximetry](#)

[Assess lung sounds with a stethoscope](#)

Elective Spine Management Skills

[Improvise litters or stretchers](#)

Elective Musculoskeletal Treatment Skills

[Apply commercial femur traction splints](#)

[Apply circumferential pelvic binder](#)

[Reduce jaw dislocations](#)

Elective Anaphylaxis Treatment Skills

[Inject medication using a syringe](#)

Core Topics & Skills

Medical-Legal

Medical-Legal

Understand the following legal concepts as they apply to wilderness medicine:

- Duty to Act and Good Samaritan Laws.
- Scope of practice.
- Consent and confidentiality.
- Understand the function of:
 - Certification.
 - Licensure.
 - Guidelines.
 - Standing orders.
 - Protocols.
 - Authorization (from a Medical Advisor).

Patient Assessment

Scene Survey

- Evaluate the scene and assess for safety and causes, including the need for personal protection equipment (PPE).
- Identify the obvious mechanism(s) of injury.
- Identify environmental and scene threats.
- Quickly evaluate resources.
- Consider the number of patients, the number of rescuers and their training, first aid/medical equipment, etc.

Primary Survey

- Stabilize life threats.
- Assist and support patients with their personal medications for life-threatening conditions such as epinephrine, short-acting bronchodilator, nitroglycerine, glucagon, naloxone, etc.
- Understand basic triage system with a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI).

Assess the need and urgency of an evacuation and consider calling for medical or evacuation assistance before continuing with the Secondary Survey. Recognize when to call for an emergency evacuation for a life threat that requires additional resources and/or advanced life support (ALS).

Respiratory System

Assess:

- Patient's ability to breathe on their own.
- Quality of ventilation.
- Airway for foreign bodies or fluids.

Treatment:

- Manually open, maintain and protect the airway with standard BLS techniques and the recovery position.
- Clear airway. Suction.
- Provide rescue breaths.
- Monitor and maintain airway control and breathing for people with an impaired Level of Responsiveness (LOR).

Circulatory System

Assess:

- Presence of patient's pulse at carotid artery.
- For life threatening bleeding/wounds.
- Likelihood of shock.

Treatment:

- Perform CPR when indicated.
- Understand start/stop considerations for CPR in the remote context.
- Control bleeding with well-aimed direct pressure, hemostatic gauze, wound packing, pressure bandage, or commercial tourniquet.

Nervous System

Assess:

- Level of Responsiveness (LOR). Know the common causes and signs and symptoms for traumatic, environmental, and medical mechanisms

Treatment:

- If LOR is depressed, attempt to identify and treat the underlying cause. Consider low blood sugar, low sodium, altitude, heat and cold illnesses, low oxygen levels, toxins, infection, etc.
- Provide ventilation ± medical oxygen for hypoxic patients.
- Identify a potential mechanism for a spine injury, and, if needed, protect the patient's spinal cord.

Core Basic Life Support skills:

- Practice and confirm practical skills via realistic simulations for adults and children:
 - Manually open airway and suction.
 - Perform rescue breathing.
 - Assess pulse at carotid artery.
 - Perform chest compressions.
 - Use AED.
 - Apply direct pressure.
 - Apply pressure bandage.
 - Maintain body temperature.
 - Understand commercial tourniquet use ± conversion.
 - Understand and consider spinal cord protection.

Elective Basic Life Support skills:

- Deliver medical oxygen via cannula or mask.
- Use airway management devices e.g. OPA, NPA, and Bag Valve Mask (BVM).
- Perform infant CPR and AED

Secondary Survey

- Perform a physical exam to identify obvious injuries or abnormalities.
- Measure and monitor vital signs: Level of Responsiveness (LOR), Heart Rate (HR), Respiratory Rate (RR), and Skin (circulation/color, temperature, wet/dry).
- Obtain a patient history.

Core secondary survey skills:

Practice and confirm practical skills via realistic simulations

- Count pulse rate (HR) at radial artery
- Count respirations (RR) and note quality
- Assess skin condition.
- Assess mental status/LOR
- Take SAMPLE history
- Complete Head-to-toe physical exam.
- Complete multiple patient SOAP notes on case-study or simulated patients

Elective secondary survey skills:

- Blood Pressure (BP) with a sphygmomanometer with or without a stethoscope
- Measure pulse oximetry
- Assessing lung sounds with a stethoscope.

Plan

- Document scene, primary, secondary survey findings, and patient information in a SOAP note.
- Develop a current and anticipated problem list.
- Develop and prioritize a treatment plan.
- Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Deliver a concise, complete, and clear verbal patient report to an outside agency if requesting assistance / additional resources.
- Monitor a patient for changes over time.
- Continually reevaluate treatment and evacuation plans.

Traumatic Problems

Traumatic Brain Injury

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of a minor traumatic brain injury (mTBI).
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of increasing intracranial pressure.
- Treatment:
 - Protect the airway.
 - Protect the spinal cord.
 - Protect from environmental extremes.
 - Monitor for changes in mental status, decreased LOR and vomiting.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Hypovolemic Shock

- Assessment:
 - Evaluate for hypovolemic shock due to internal or external bleeding.
 - Recognize signs, symptoms, and vital sign patterns of hypovolemic shock and differentiate them from an acute stress reaction.
- Treatment:
 - Identify and manage the cause of hypovolemia
 - Keep the patient warm and protect from adverse environmental conditions
 - Provide oral fluids to maintain urine output for patients with normal mental status.
 - Stabilize injuries.
 - Minimize physical exertion.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Chest Trauma

- Assessment:
 - Evaluate and recognize the signs and symptoms of respiratory distress and respiratory failure due to chest trauma and subsequent lung injury.
 - Differentiate between open and closed chest injuries
 - Assess for flail chest/paradoxical chest rise
- Treatment:
 - Maintain a position that supports breathing.
 - Maintain a patent airway and support ventilation.
 - Stabilize/support injuries to the chest wall.
 - Seal an open chest wound; use a vented chest seal if feasible. Monitor.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Spine Injury

- Assessment:
 - Recognize a high-risk mechanism of injury for spinal cord damage.
 - Assess for potential spine injury via acceptable Focused Spine Assessment (FSA): Canadian C-spine Rule, modified NEXUS criteria, or Wilderness Medical Society FSA. Consider neurogenic/vascular shock.
 - If you cannot rule out a spine injury, evaluate for vascular shock due to high (C-1 through C-4) spinal cord injury.
- Treatment:
 - Protect the airway.
 - Protect the spinal cord.
 - Use rolls, lifts, and extrication as needed to facilitate patient examination and protection.
 - Protect from adverse environmental conditions. Keep the patient warm.
 - Consider self-evacuation for ambulatory patients who fail the FSA due to low-risk column injuries.
 - Stabilize/protect and evacuate non-ambulatory patients who fail the FSA on a commercial litter, vacuum splint, or stretcher.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Core spine management skills:

- Know how to conduct a FSA and evaluate the type of evacuation needed.
- Know how to lift and move spine-injured patients.
- Know how to protect the spine and keep the patient warm.
- Know how to package spine-injured patients in (a) commercial litter(s). Examples include wire basket litter (Stokes), SKED, vacuum splint, fiberglass or plastic litters (Thompson, etc.).

Elective spine management skills:

- Improvise litters or stretchers using ropes, backboards, tarps, poles, etc.

Soft Tissue Injury

Wounds

- Assessment:
 - Recognize life-threatening bleeding.
 - Assess and document tetanus vaccination.
 - With an animal bite, assess and document the need for rabies prophylaxis.
 - Distinguish simple versus high-risk wounds.
- Treatment:
 - Control bleeding with direct pressure, pressure/clot enhancing bandage, or commercial tourniquet.
 - Clean wounds by removing debris and pressure irrigation/debridement.
 - Dress and bandage wounds. For large wounds, deep puncture wounds, consider wet-to-dry dressings. Dress abdominal eviscerations with moist gauze and keep the patient warm.
 - Manage blisters, splinters, and fish hook injuries.
 - Remove impaled objects unless met with increased bleeding, pain, or resistance. Do not remove objects impaled in the globe of the eye.
 - Manage amputations (control bleeding, wrap amputated part in moist gauze, place in a plastic bag, and keep cool while protecting from drying and freezing).
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Infections

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of local versus systemic infection.
- Treatment:
 - Hot compresses (avoid scalding the patient) promote drainage, and monitor.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Understand prevention: drug-resistant infections and bloodborne pathogen awareness. Wound cleaning is preemptive

Burns

- Assessment:
 - Recognise the common causes of wilderness burns—hot water burns, grease burns, etc.—and take steps to mitigate them.
 - Assess depth: superficial, partial, or full thickness.
 - Approximate percent of body surface area involved.
 - Identify high-risk anatomical areas (e.g., airway, face, hands, feet, and genitals).
- Treatment:
 - Cool burns and protect with a clean, non-adherent bandage.
 - Understand that most burns are evacuated due to patient comfort, inability to travel or participate, or lack of appropriate dressing.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Musculoskeletal Injury

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of musculoskeletal injury.
 - Differentiate between stable and unstable extremity injuries.
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of high-risk problems associated with musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., fractures of the femur or pelvis, open fractures, compartment syndrome, joint infections, and persistent ischemia).
- Treatment:
 - Treat stable extremity injuries with supportive and anti-inflammatory treatment.
 - Treat unstable and angulated long-bone extremity injuries with gentle traction into anatomical position.
 - Reposition unstable joint extremity injuries into mid-range anatomical position if there is impaired circulation, sensation, and motor skills (CSM) or if splinting in position is impossible.
 - Splint unstable extremity injuries. Splints should provide adequate stabilization, be comfortable during extended evacuations, and allow for ongoing assessment of CSM.
 - Irrigate the wound and clean bone ends before applying traction to and splinting an open fracture.
 - Consider reducing simple dislocations from indirect mechanisms of anterior shoulder, patella, digit.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Core musculoskeletal injury treatment skills:

- Practice and demonstrate dislocated anterior shoulder, patella, and digit reduction techniques
- Understand the principles and practice improvised long bone and joint splints.

Elective musculoskeletal injury treatment skills:

- Apply commercial traction splints for femur fractures.
- Apply circumferential pelvic wrap (pelvic binder) for suspected pelvic fractures.
- Reduce jaw dislocations.

Environmental Problems

Sunburn

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of a sunburn (superficial to partial).
- Treatment:
 - Consider the application of over-the-counter (OTC) medications or aloe.
 - Maintain hydration.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Understand the role of ultraviolet barriers; sunscreen and clothing.

Snow Blindness (photokeratitis)

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of photokeratitis.
- Treatment:
 - Remove from sunlight until signs and symptoms resolve.
 - Use cool compresses to mitigate pain.
 - Improvise slit sunglasses if goggles or sunglasses are unavailable.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Wear goggles or dark glasses with side protection to minimize ultraviolet (UV) exposure in bright sun, and on snow or water (due to reflection).

Dehydration

- Assessment:
 - Recognize common causes and spectrum of signs and symptoms for mild to severe dehydration.
- Treatment:
 - Provide oral fluids and electrolytes to satisfy thirst. Know how to improvise an effective oral electrolyte solution.
 - Identify and treat the underlying cause.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider fitness for the activity, hydration status, environmental temperatures, exertion levels, altitude, etc.

Heat Exhaustion

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion.
- Treatment:
 - Stop activity, remove insulative clothing, and find a cooler area.
 - Provide oral fluids to satisfy thirst.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider fitness, environmental temperatures, exertion levels, work/ rest ratios, hydration status, underlying medical conditions, physical conditioning, and predisposing medications (e.g., prescriptions, OTC, herbs, and dietary supplements)

Heat Stroke

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of heat stroke.
- Treatment:
 - Aggressive, immediate core cooling as per available resources: Consider cool/cold water immersion, misting, fanning, shade, etc.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
 - Perform CPR when indicated.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider environmental temperatures, exertion levels, hydration status, underlying medical conditions, physical conditioning, and predisposing medications (e.g., prescriptions, OTC, herbs, dietary supplements/ stimulants).

Exercise Associated Hyponatremia

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the spectrum of signs and symptoms for mild to severe exercise associated (exertional) hyponatremia
- Treatment:
 - Provide sodium and initiate fluid restriction.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider hydration status and amount of water consumed relative to sodium consumption.

Rhabdomyolysis

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of Rhabdomyolysis as a result of exertion, and heat stroke.
- Treatment:
 - Stop exertion and cool the patient as necessary.
 - Administer fluids (with electrolytes).
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Consider hydration status, environmental temperatures, exertion levels, and physical conditioning.

Hypothermia

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the spectrum of signs and symptoms for mild to severe hypothermia.
- Treatment:
 - Mild Hypothermia:
 - Give oral fluids and calories and protect from the environment. Consider a hypothermia wrap.
 - Moderate Hypothermia:
 - Handle gently and place supine in hypothermia wrap ± added heat.
 - Severe Hypothermia:
 - Handle gently and place supine in hypothermia wrap with added heat.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
 - Perform rescue breathing or CPR when indicated.
- Prevention:
 - Identify and manage predisposing environmental and clinical conditions to prevent hypothermia. Consider environmental temperatures, wind, rain or snow, exertion levels (exhaustion), hydration status, available calories, shelter, and clothing.

Core hypothermia treatment skills:

- Practice and demonstrate how to build and move a patient into a hypothermia wrap.

Frostbite

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of superficial to full thickness frostbite.
- Treatment:
 - Assess pros and cons of field thawing versus evacuation on frozen limb(s); manage for the best patient and group care:
 - Ideally, field thaw superficial frostbite in a warm water bath. Practically, this may need to be skin-to-skin.
 - Avoid refreezing affected areas.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
 - Consider evacuating a patient with frozen extremities if evacuation time is 24 hours or less, when navigating technical terrain, or when resources are unavailable to properly thaw in the field.
- Prevention:
 - Recognize predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider environmental temperatures, wind, snow, rain, exertion levels (exhaustion), hydration status, available calories, shelter, and clothing choice and fit (avoid local constriction).

Non-Freezing Cold Injuries

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of nonfreezing cold injuries immersion foot, Raynaud's disease, and chilblains
 - Treatment immersion foot:
 - Passively rewarm the afflicted area (pat or air dry); the use of external heat sources to rewarm are contraindicated.
 - Elevate to reduce pain and swelling.
 - Understand that patients with swollen feet should not walk. If walking is unavoidable, protect feet and wear non-constricting footwear.
 - Treatment Raynaud's disease and chilblains foot:
 - Gently rewarm the afflicted area.
 - Avoid continued exposure.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Recognize predisposing environmental and clinical conditions; avoidance equals prevention. For immersion, consider immersion time in cold water, sweat, and clothing choice.

Drowning

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the spectrum of signs and symptoms for fatal and non-fatal drowning.
- Treatment:
 - Rescue from the water, as per rescue training, with attention to practical respiratory support and spinal protection. When possible, maintain potentially severely hypothermic patients in a horizontal position during removal from the cold water as well as immediately after extrication from the water.
 - Provide rescue breathing as needed and breathe through foam exudate.
 - Perform rescue breathing or CPR when indicated.
 - Treat for hypothermia as necessary.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Know the factors that contribute to drowning. For example, alcohol, not wearing a personal floatation device, cold water, group think, altered mental status (due to trauma, substances that alter mental status, medical problem, etc.), lack of skill, etc.
 - Recognize and manage high-risk environmental conditions designed to prevent extended immersion and submersion times.

Lightning

- Assessment:
 - Know the common mechanisms of lightning injury and common presentation of injury (cardiovascular, neurological, burns, and potential for traumatic injuries).
- Treatment:
 - Prioritize treating apnic and pulseless patients.
 - Perform rescue breathing or CPR when indicated.
 - Triage and treat any traumatic injuries.
- Prevention:
 - Recognize high-risk locations and weather conditions to minimize the risk of lightning strikes.

Altitude-Related Problems

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS).
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE).
 - Recognize patients who need to stop ascent and acclimatize or descend/evacuate.
- Treatment:
 - Stop ascent if symptomatic.
 - Descend if no improvement.
 - Descend immediately in presence of shortness of breath (HAPE) and ataxia and/or mental status changes (HACE).
 - Consider prescription medications.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and mitigation/prevention strategies. Consider preventative medications, acclimatization, and rate of ascent.

Arthropods Bites & Stings (insects, arachnids e.g., scorpions, spiders)

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of common arthropod bites and stings.
- Treatment:
 - Clean bites. Monitor for infection and necrosis.
 - Monitor for respiratory distress or failure and provide rescue breathing as needed.
 - Remove embedded ticks.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation. If signs and symptoms of a tick-borne illness appear, evacuate.
- Prevention:
 - Understand the role and importance of avoidance, clothing, netting, repellents, and insecticides in the prevention of disease transmission.

Snakebite

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of cytotoxic, hemotoxic, and neurotoxic envenomations.
- Treatment:
 - Clean the bite site
 - Immobilize the limb.
 - Monitor for signs and symptoms of envenomation.
 - Mark leading edge of pain, tenderness, swelling, and bruising, on patient's skin and document in writing and with photos.
 - Monitor for hypovolemic shock, and provide BLS care as needed.
 - Monitor for anaphylaxis; treat if necessary.
 - In certain geographic areas, the use of compression wraps with certain species of venomous snakes may be indicated.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify common human behaviors that are factors in snakebite incidents.
 - Research snake behavior and habitat before entering venomous snake territory.

Medical Problems

The scope of practice for a WFR includes the prevention and initiation of reasonable and prudent field treatment for minor medical problems and the rapid recognition of signs and symptoms requiring evacuation for potentially life-threatening ones.

Heart Disease

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of a cardiac emergency.
 - Distinguish between angina and a cardiac emergency.
- Treatment:
 - Stop activity. Keep the patient calm and in a position of comfort, typically sitting or semi-reclining.
 - Support reliable patients, administer chewable aspirin as first line treatment and assist with their personal medications (e.g. prescribed nitroglycerine).
 - Perform CPR when indicated.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider patient history—including prescription medications—risk factors, and physical demands of the activity

Cerebral Vascular Accident (Stroke)

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of a cerebral vascular accident (CVA) and be familiar with methods (e.g., FAST assessment) to assess a patient exhibiting these signs and symptoms.
- Treatment:
 - Keep the patient calm and offer reassurance.
 - Determine when the patient was last seen as “normal.”
 - Perform rescue breathing or CPR when indicated.
 - Aspirin is contraindicated.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider patient history—including prescription medications—and physical demands of the activity.

Seizures

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of partial and generalized seizures.
- Treatment:
 - During a seizure: Protect the patient from injury but do not restrain or put anything in the patient’s mouth.
 - Post-seizure: Keep the patient calm and provide reassurance. Protect and manage the airway and provide rescue breathing when needed.
 - Assess and treat any traumatic injuries incurred during the seizure.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider patient history, including seizures, past traumatic brain injuries, and prescription medications.

Problems with Sugar

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia in people with diabetes.
 - Recognize the possibility of non-life threatening hypoglycemia in people who do not have diabetes.
- Treatment for hypoglycemia:
 - Administer oral glucose tabs/sugar (honey, maple syrup, hard candy, juice) to all awake patients. Keep hydrated.
 - Consider administering glucagon (IM or nasal spray) in unresponsive patients. If unavailable, rub oral glucose/sugar paste—honey and maple syrup work—on the oral mucosa of all voice-responsive, pain-responsive, and unresponsive patients while they are lying on their side to protect their airway.
 - Administering insulin to patients with an altered mental status or are voice-responsive, pain-responsive, and unresponsive patients is contraindicated.
 - If intervention is successful, give a complex carbohydrate and protein meal.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Treatment for hyperglycemia:
 - Keep the patient hydrated and assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider patient history, including prescription medications, and individual diabetes management plan.
 - Awareness that acute onset of illness (e.g., influenza, COVID-19) may affect glucose levels in persons with diabetes.

Toxic Reactions

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of toxic reactions and poisons commonly encountered in a wilderness environment.
 - Understand general principles of ingested, inhaled, and absorbed poison management.
- Treatment:
 - If possible, consult with a local poison control center (PCC) with the type of toxin/chemical, how much, when (time), where, and the patient's weight.
 - Treat for anaphylaxis if present.
 - Perform rescue breathing or CPR when indicated.
 - Ingested Poisons:
 - Supportive care and evacuation.
 - Inhaled Poisons:(commonly carbon monoxide , occasionally other gasses e.g., volcanic fumes, smoke, carbon dioxide, etc.)
 - Scene safety. Remove from exposure.
 - Administer O₂, if indicated and available.
 - Absorbed Poisons:
 - Remove contaminated clothing.
 - Flush the area with water and wash with soap.
 - Suspected opioid overdose:
 - Administer naloxone. Repeat as necessary.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Prior to the trip, research potential wilderness toxins; avoidance equals prevention.

Contact Allergic Reactions (Poison Ivy, Oak, Sumac, etc.)

- Recognize signs and symptoms of contact allergic dermatitis.
- Treatment:
 - Wash affected area with soap and cool water to remove oily plant resin (urushiol)
 - Manage itching with cool compresses and topical corticosteroids.
 - Monitor for anaphylaxis.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider patient history and individual management plan.

Local and Mild Allergic Reactions

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of local and mild allergic reactions.
- Initiate treatment:
 - Treat local reactions with cool compresses and topical corticosteroid.
 - Treat mild local allergic reactions with an oral antihistamine.
 - Monitor for anaphylaxis and treat if necessary.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider patient history and individual management plan.

Anaphylaxis

- Assessment:
 - Understand the difference between and recognize signs and symptoms of anaphylactic and anaphylactoid reactions.
- Treatment:
 - Identify and remove the allergen or trigger when possible.
 - Administer epinephrine as a first-line treatment for all anaphylactic and anaphylactoid reactions.
 - Administer an oral H1 antihistamine—consider an H2 antihistamine—as adjunctive treatment.
 - Consider administering a corticosteroid (oral dexamethasone or prednisone) as per standing orders.
 - Monitor for a second phase anaphylactic reaction and treat with epinephrine as described above.
 - Take steps to avoid repeated exposure to the allergen or trigger.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider patient history, including prescription medications (in addition to epinephrine), and individual anaphylaxis management plan.
- *Core anaphylaxis treatment skills:*
 - Practice and demonstrate how to use an epinephrine auto-injector.
- *Elective anaphylaxis treatment skills:*
 - Practice and demonstrate how to manually inject via a syringe ± draw epinephrine from a vial or ampule.

Asthma

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of mild to moderate asthma flare-ups and severe reactions.
- Treatment:
 - Identify and remove triggers when possible.
 - Assist patient into a position of comfort that supports breathing. Mild to moderate flare-ups:
 - Stop activity, rest, and calm the patient.
 - Assist the patient with their personal medications (prescribed short-acting bronchodilator)
 - Severe reactions:
 - Administer epinephrine. Once normal breathing has been restored, assist with short-acting bronchodilators.
 - Consider corticosteroids.
 - Provide respiratory support—rescue breathing, oxygen, or nebulized medication if available—when breathing becomes inadequate.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider patient history, including prescription medications, and individual asthma management plan.
 - Be familiar with the common triggers (cold, exercise, allergy, and stress) and emergency medications (short acting bronchodilators, epinephrine).

Respiratory Infections

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of upper and lower respiratory infections.
 - Sinus infection: runny nose, sinus congestion, colored discharge, ± headache, sinus pain
 - Throat infection: sore throat, dry cough, ± fever, swollen lymph glands
 - Lower airway infection: fever, cough, chest tightness, and shortness of breath
- Treatment:
 - Rest.
 - Focus on adequate hydration.
 - Treat symptomatically:
 - Sinus infection: Consider salt water flush, a local or systemic OTC decongestant; do not use antihistamines.
 - Throat infection: Consider salt water gargle, OTC cough suppressant or cough drops, consider zinc lozenges, and evacuate if strep is suspected.
 - Lower airway infection: consider using a OTC expectorant during the day and a OTC cough suppressant before bed, steam inhalation may ease episodes of respiratory distress
 - Quarantine as needed
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider camp hygiene, hand washing, mask use, and isolation of participants with potential airborne diseases (COVID, SARS, etc.).

Flu-like Illness

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of flu-like illness (nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, fever, cough, upper respiratory involvement)
- Treatment:
 - Rest.
 - Focus on adequate hydration. Treat symptomatically using OTC medications.
 - Quarantine as needed
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider camp hygiene, hand washing, mask use, and isolation of participants with potential airborne diseases (COVID, SARS, etc.).

Genitourinary Issues

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of vaginal yeast infections, urinary tract infections (UTI), testicular pain (e.g., torsion and epididymitis), atypical vaginal bleeding (i.e. miscarriage or menorrhagia), ectopic pregnancy.
- Treatment:
 - Treat vaginal yeast infections (Candidiasis) symptomatically with OTC medications. Consider prescription medications.
 - Treat UTIs with hydration and improved hygiene. Consider prescription medications.
 - In the event of testicular torsion, have the patient attempt a field correction by unweighting the scrotum.
 - Treat suspected epididymis with OTC medications and ice to control pain, definitive treatment typically requires antibiotics.
 - For atypical vaginal bleeding, provide supportive care and fluids, evacuate as needed.
 - For ectopic pregnancy, see abdominal pain and acute abdomen.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider medical history, prescription medications, hydration status, and hygiene.

Abdominal Pain (including Gastrointestinal Illnesses)

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of abdominal pain commonly encountered during wilderness travel: bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhea, and nausea/vomiting.
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of an acute abdomen that require an urgent evacuation: rigid abdominal muscles, guarding, rebound pain, and generalized abdominal pain that becomes specific.
- Treatment:
 - Rest. Position of comfort.
 - Consider treating symptomatically with OTC medication. Focus on adequate hydration and adjust diet as needed.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Prevention focuses on diet, camp hygiene, hand washing, food choice and preparation, and water disinfection.

Eye Problems

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of small foreign bodies (dirt, insects) in the eye and infection.
- Treatment:
 - Gently irrigate to remove small foreign bodies or pus from a bacterial infection. Do not remove impaled objects from the globe of the eye.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider hygiene, contact lenses and solution, and back-up glasses.

Ear Problems

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the signs and symptoms of objects in the ear, ear infections, and punctured or ruptured eardrum.
- Treatment:
 - Insect (or loose objects) in ear: Gently flush with warm water.
 - Ear infections: Evacuate.
 - Ruptured eardrum: Evacuate. Do not flush with water.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider the patient's history of ear infections, swimming, and water activities.

Nosebleeds (epistaxis)

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of an anterior nosebleed.
- Treatment:
 - Gently blow nose, firmly pinch bridge of nose and lean forward. Consider packing the nose with gauze.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider the patient's history, cold, dry air, and high altitude.

Dental Emergencies

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of lost crown/fillings, broken teeth, avulsed teeth, and dental infections.
 - If facial trauma is present, assess for a traumatic brain injury.
- Treatment:
 - Cover lost fillings and repair broken crowns with dental cement.
 - Attempt to preserve avulsed teeth if the evacuation is less than one hour.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions and prevention strategies. Consider facial trauma, poor hygiene, dental history, and lack of pre-trip screening.

Motion Sickness

- Assessment:
 - Recognize the causes and signs and symptoms of motion sickness.
- Treatment:
 - If possible, remove the underlying cause.
 - Consider OTC and prescription antiemetic medications.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider fresh air, focusing on the horizon, OTC or prescription medications, and acupressure points.

Elective Topics

Electives are skills and knowledge within the WFR scope of practice that can be included or excluded at the discretion of the course provider to meet the specific needs of the student and the context in which they will use their WFR training. Elective skills and topics require additional course time.

SCUBA Diving Injuries

- Assessment:
 - Know the physiology of Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA) and breathing gas under pressure.
 - Know the basic pathophysiology and signs and symptoms of pulmonary overpressure problems and decompression sickness.
- Treatment:
 - Stabilization of critical system problems.
 - Provide supplemental high-flow oxygen when available.
 - Contact Divers Alert Network or other professional support and begin an urgent evacuation for decompression and medical assistance.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider diver history and experience, depth of dive, number of dives in 24 hours, and gas mixture.

Marine Toxins/Envenomations

- Assessment:
 - Recognize signs and symptoms of nematocyst stings, venomous spines, bites, and stings.
- Treatment:
 - Treat Nematocysts—jellyfish, siphonophores, corals, anemones—by removing tentacles followed by an acetic acid wash (if unfamiliar with species, test first) and subsequent submersion in hot water (113° F/45° C) for 45 minutes.
 - Treat venomous marine spine injuries with hot water soak until pain is relieved or 30-90 minutes; follow with standard wound care.
 - Monitor for respiratory distress or failure and provide rescue breathing as needed.
 - Monitor for anaphylaxis; treat as necessary.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Identify predisposing environmental and clinical conditions. Consider inquiring about local knowledge, wearing stinger suits to protect from nematocysts, Research behavior patterns and habitat before entering their territory; prevention equals avoidance.

SAR Fundamentals

- Understand fundamental concepts of search and rescue, Incident Command System (ICS), and evacuation plans.

Psychological First Aid

- Recognize signs of stress in participants and colleagues.
- Understand the Stress Continuum Model and how it can be applied to participants during a wilderness trip and members of a rescue or medical team, and to organizations.
- Understand the 3-3-3 trauma exposure protocol for patients and first responders after a traumatic event.

Behavioral Health/Mental Health Emergencies

- Recognize when a patient is in crisis.
- Assess relevant personal history.
- Assess for risk of harm to self or others.
- Provide support and implement appropriate interventions.
- Consult with a mental health professional as needed/able.
- Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.

Emergency Childbirth

- Assessment:
 - Recognise the signs and symptoms of a high-risk pregnancy that warrant an urgent evacuation (persistent pelvic pain or bleeding, persistent headache, vaginal bleeding, hypertension, fever, shock, trauma, seizures).
 - Familiarity with the stages of labor. Transport/evacuate in stage 1 if possible.
- Treatment:
 - Identify BSI and field equipment suitable for delivery.
 - Assist with the delivery.
 - Recognize and treat common problems during delivery (Altered mental status or seizures, prolonged labor without delivery, heavy bleeding before or after delivery, limb or breech presentation, cord prolapse).
 - Recognize and treat common problems for newborns (obstructed airway, inadequate respirations, low pulse rate, hypothermia).
 - Perform rescue breaths and CPR when indicated.
 - Deliver and protect the placenta.
 - Assess the need and urgency of evacuation.
- Prevention:
 - Pregnant women should avoid recreating in remote regions in the third trimester of pregnancy.

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