



## What to do if you suspect a Spinal Cord Injury

Spinal cord injuries are always serious. At the scene of an accident if you suspect a spinal cord injury it is vital to take great care as this will help minimise permanent disability and increase the person's potential for recovery.

After an accident, if the person has the following signs and symptoms, they could have a spinal cord injury and shouldn't be moved.

- Head or neck in abnormal position
- Weakness or inability to move limbs
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Breathing difficulties
- Altered conscious state or shock
- Nausea, headache or dizziness
- Tingling or numbness in the limbs and area below the injury
- Change in muscle tone e.g. limbs stiff
- Pain at injured site

**If you suspect a spinal cord injury take the following steps:**

1. Dial the emergency service number 000 (free call) and ask for either ambulance, or police, in order of urgency.
2. Follow DRABC  
**D** check for **DANGER** - to you, others and the injured person  
**R** check for **RESPONSE** - Is the person conscious?  
**A** check **AIRWAY** - Is airway clear of objects?  
**B** check for **BREATHING**  
**C** give **CPR** - If the person is not breathing start CPR.  
**D** Defibrillation - Wait for a medical officer to complete this step
3. If the person is wearing a helmet, do not remove it unless it is stopping them from breathing and/or preventing CPR.
4. If any trauma to the neck or back is suspected it is strongly recommend NOT to move the person. If the person is lying on their back and struggling to breathe due to fluid or blood blocking their airway, then WHILST supporting their neck, having someone supporting their back, roll the person in one movement to their side, whilst keeping full support at all times.
5. Support the neck and immobilise them immediately. When the paramedics arrive they will take over treatment. Please be aware that any movement to a neck or back that is compromised or damaged could risk permanent damage.



Disclaimer: This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.