

# EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

## AUTONOMIC DYSREFLEXIA (AD)

A potentially life-threatening condition for individuals with a spinal cord injury. AD is an abnormal overreaction of the autonomic nervous system in response to an irritating stimulus below the level of the spinal cord injury. AD causes narrowing of the blood vessels and a sudden increase in blood pressure. It is important to lower blood pressure by identifying and removing the stimuli. Bladder and bowel irritation are the most common causes of AD. Other sources of discomfort such as pressure areas on the skin, tight clothing or socks, ingrown toenails, and blisters can also trigger a response.

### WARNING SIGNS

- Increased blood pressure
- Sudden onset headache
- Blurry vision
- Shortness of breath
- Slowed heart rate
- Sweating above level of injury
- Flushed face or red blotchy skin above level of injury
- Cold, clammy skin or goose bumps
- Nasal congestion
- Menstrual cramping
- Nausea
- Anxiety

### ESSENTIAL STEPS

1. Do not leave student unattended.
2. Contact the school nurse/health room.
3. If blood pressure above \_\_\_\_\_, call 911.
4. Reposition student in an upright position and lower the legs.
5. Loosen any restricting items including clothing, socks, braces. For males, pressure on scrotum may cause AD. Reposition as necessary.
6. Encourage student to perform pressure releases, as able.
7. Relieve possible bladder distention (e.g., perform clean intermittent catheterization per orders, check for kinks in indwelling catheter tubing).
8. Administer blood pressure medication per orders.
9. If bladder is empty and symptoms have not subsided, check for fecal impaction.
10. Continue to monitor blood pressure every 3-5 minutes.
11. If blood pressure has not decreased after \_\_\_\_ minutes, call 911.

