

First Aid Kits

Should I buy a prepackaged first-aid kit? The prepackaged first-aid kits currently available are economical and contain many of the essential items. No single commercial product, however, will contain everything you need in your personalized family kit. So you can start with the prepackaged kit and add the extra items you require, or build your own from scratch. You'll also need to keep many of the same items in your medicine chest to treat your baby's everyday ups and downs.

Do I need more than one first-aid kit? It all depends on your needs and your lifestyle. You may want a large kit for home base; a small kit for your purse, backpack, or diaper bag; and a portable one for the car that goes with you whenever you travel. (Keep in mind that extreme heat or cold can render some medications ineffective, so if you have a kit in your car you'll need to swap out some of its contents over time.)

For safety's sake, store all kits in a lunch or tackle box or a zippered bag and out of reach of curious babies and children. Any item in a first-aid kit can be hazardous if left within reach of a child's hands.

Emergency names and numbers: The most important items in your family's first-aid kit may actually be names and numbers. Securely tape, glue, or sew the following contact information inside your kit:

- Your family doctor or pediatrician.
- Your local children's hospital.
- The American Association of Poison Control Centers' national emergency hotline: (800) 222-1222.
- Your local police, fire, and rescue squad.
- Your two closest neighbors (in case you need immediate assistance, such as childcare for an older sibling or a ride to the hospital). You'll also want to post these on the refrigerator for your immediate use and for babysitters.

Filling the kit: Here are your first-aid kit must-haves:

- Infant and/or child thermometers (both digital and ear or rectal).
- Children's and infants' non-aspirin liquid pain reliever (acetaminophen), as recommended by your pediatrician.
- Topical calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream (1/2 percent) for insect bites and rashes.
- Rubbing alcohol to clean thermometers, tweezers, and scissors.
- Petroleum jelly to lubricate rectal thermometers.
- An antiseptic skin cleaner, such as Hibiclens (don't use hydrogen peroxide, which causes tissue damage).
- Antibacterial cream, also for cuts and scrapes.
- Tweezers for removing splinters and ticks.
- A pair of sharp scissors.
- Child-safe sunscreen lotion
- Child-safe insect repellent.
- Pediatrician-approved children's-strength liquid decongestant.
- Nasal aspirator bulb (not a pointy-ended ear syringe).
- An assortment of adhesive bandage strips in various sizes and shapes
- Gauze rolls (1/2 to 2 inches wide).
- Gauze pads (2 by 2 and 4 by 4 inches).
- Adhesive tape.
- Sterile cotton balls.
- Cotton-tipped swabs.
- Mild liquid soap (most antibacterial and deodorant soaps are too strong for babies' sensitive skin).
- An oral syringe or calibrated cup or spoon for administering medicines to infants and children.
- A package of tongue depressors for checking sore throats.
- A hot-water bottle and an ice pack.
- A small flashlight to check ears, nose, throat, and eyes.
- First-aid manual; Janet Zand's Parent's Guide to Medical Emergencies gives advice for handling a wide range of emergencies.

Additional items to include if recommended by your pediatrician:

- Rehydration fluids, such as Pedialyte, to treat infant diarrhea.
- Epinephrine injector, asthma inhaler, or other prescription medication if your child is allergic to bee stings, peanuts, or shellfish, or if he has some other type of life-threatening allergy.