



Street medic during S26, Prague, Czech Republic

## Action Medical

It may seem strange to think about first aid as a form of direct action, but the reality is that our healthcare needs as radicals are different, and groups such as the Red Cross/Crescent don't meet them. Emergency medical services tend to coordinate with the police during demonstrations: this frequently means they can't or won't cross police lines in order to treat the injured. And they certainly don't have much experience removing the contact lenses and scrubbing the bodies of hundreds of people after they've been pepper sprayed by the police. This is where street medics come in.

It doesn't take an expert with lots of certifications to help keep people safe and secure during an action. A neurosurgeon who can't work collectively is less useful than someone who has no technical skills, is really nice, and has lots of water to share. Some of the most important stuff

can be done by anyone. It's always useful to try and spread calm. You can try and negotiate with police to allow an ambulance to come, or to delay a police charge until a patient has been evacuated. You can even help by handing out information about healthcare post-action, or lists of free / activist-friendly clinics and practitioners.

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### How to fight the power and do no harm:

#### Step 1: Prepare yourself

Because you'll sometimes be working in extreme conditions, it can be good to mentally prepare. Talk with other healthcare workers (activist or not, some of the issues are universal) about the stress and the gratification; watch videos of mass actions to get a sense of crowd dynamics and tactics used, and envision yourself working in similarly chaotic situations; go on actions and see if you can

find medics in the crowd. It's good to be aware that medics may be arrested, as the police generally won't treat you differently than other protesters. Prepare yourself also for boredom – long marches where nothing happens, no one gets hurt, and you're stuck carrying loads of water.

### **Step 2: Get first aid training**

Start with a basic course, and if you like what you learn, get more training. There are several radical healthcare collectives in the US and in Europe that teach first aid courses addressing our special needs as activists. But if there isn't one near you, the next best thing would be to find something like a wilderness first responder course. This may seem strange if you're an urbanite planning a street party, but if you imagine the city filled with riot police, road blockades, public transport strikes, or other disruptions associated with large actions, you can see that the trip to the

hospital which normally takes ten minutes might take three hours during an action. You might as well be in the wilderness in terms of your access to high tech healthcare. The Red Cross/Crescent offers trainings as well, designed more for family care than crisis, but they'll teach you basic skills applicable in the streets.

### **Step 3: Assemble your gear**

Street medics are often 'gear-heads', and so there are innumerable variations on what to carry and how. In terms of first aid materials, carry only what you're confident with and trained to use. Over time you'll figure out what is essential. Most everyone agrees that packs that are worn on the hips are most easily accessible and backpacks are the least. Some people wear helmets and gas masks and others wouldn't dream of it. Protection from the elements – a sun hat or rain gear – is really nice. Comfortable shoes are crucial, as are multiple pockets.

Lots of water and latex or nitrile gloves are essential. A good attitude, even more so. And don't forget a bandana or two.

### **Step 4: Coordinate with others**

Working with a partner is highly recommended, in fact, you'd be completely crazy not to. This is for safety reasons as well as practical reasons – it's nice to have someone to watch your back, call for help, and shoo away the media while you're focused on helping someone. You could be a medic for your affinity group, or you could form a group in which all members are medics. Whatever you do, it's good to figure out your limitations, not only in terms of medical skills, but also regarding your level of comfort. Do you want to be in the front lines all the time, or do you want to wait around the corner and catch people as they run from police charges? Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know how to deal with this injury," and seek someone who does; don't

shy away from saying "I don't feel comfortable staying here." Respecting your limits is one of the most important things you can do on the streets.

### **Step 5: Take care of yourself**

Witnessing lots of injuries can be hard. Debriefing with others after actions, even if only for ten minutes, can really help prevent trauma, burn out, and feelings of isolation. Be sure and drink lots of water, and be good to your body and mind. It's crucial to work sustainably.

Hopefully this information helps you to be safer and stronger in your activism. Remember that we do this because it's important and fun, and that at least some danger is essential to life.

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### **Resources:**

- » **Info on protest safety, trainings, and pepper spray/tear gas:** [www.blackcrosscollective.org](http://www.blackcrosscollective.org)
- » **US network of street medics:** [www.action-medical.net](http://www.action-medical.net)