

10 Common Injuries During Societal Breakdown

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10 COMMON INJURIES DURING SOCIETAL BREAKDOWN



If you look at the statistics for injuries around the world you'll find they are often divided into categories defined by workplace injuries, home injuries, injuries related to crimes and violence, and injuries related to natural disasters.

The reason those statistics are defined that way is because of the unique dangers that each presents on an everyday basis. But that all changes during a societal breakdown and every possible injury becomes an everyday threat.

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When the Uncommon Becomes Common

First degree burns are common but the severity of those burns will often rise to 2nd and 3rd degree burns during a societal collapse. The same is true for the most common injury in the world: "ankle sprains." Not only will the number of ankle sprains increase but broken ankles will begin to grow into the [statistical database](#).

A Lesson from Today

Today, around the world, numerous countries are in a state of societal breakdown. The reasons vary from [economic collapse](#) (Venezuela, Yemen and Afghanistan); to [civil unrest and civil war](#) (Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia), to [ruthless dictatorships](#) (North Korea, Myanmar, and Syria).

If we're going to project how a societal breakdown increases the threat of injuries in the U.S. we can look at how those current events have effected not only new dangers in daily life, but the accompanying collapse of medical facilities and treatment.

Common Injuries Vary

It's difficult to order injuries on a scale from one to 10 across such a complex matrix of events, but if you think about how lives and lifestyles are affected by societal collapse you can start to see how new threats emerge to increase the potential for certain injuries.

In that regard, we're going to try and link the way that events can not only increase the risk of injury, but the specific injuries that commonly occur.

Emerging Events That Can Lead to Injury

Increased Physical Exertion

Life in a collapsed society is an arduous physical existence. Many everyday luxuries like electricity, water, heat, air-conditioning, refrigeration, and even automobiles will become unreliable and possibly unavailable. The only alternative is to improvise.

That could include finding and purifying water, collecting firewood for heat, walking or riding a bike almost everywhere, and basically compensating for the lack of machines through physical exertion. That physical exertion could lead to one of the top 10 injuries: overexertion.

Increased Incidence of Fires

A variety of factors can increase fires in a collapsed society from the rubble of abandoned buildings to arson to a general lack of emergency services that are often overwhelmed by events. Wildfires are another factor and point to the ways that a natural disaster can lead to compound or cascading disasters further increasing the threat of injuries.

Burns are the obvious injury but severity of burns will statistically increase in addition to other fire related injuries like smoke inhalation and injuries to the eyes.

Crimes and Violence

From the gangs that have emerged in Haiti to the rise of Somali pirates, a collapse of society leads to the collapse of the rule of law. Law enforcement will be overwhelmed and injuries from crimes and violence will increase dramatically.

Gunshot wounds will be the most common injury in addition to head and body injuries from blunt-force trauma, stab wounds, and other injuries related to violent assault.

Crumbling Infrastructure

Maintenance on many things will become a thing of the past and the integrity of many buildings, bridges, and even roads will begin to deteriorate. The risk comes from falls as a result of floors collapsing in a building, a bridge collapsing under the weight of foot traffic or other traffic, or any other collapse or failure of a structure.

The injuries will vary from broken bones to severe bruising, piercings from sharp or protruding objects, and deep cuts and scrapes.

Deteriorating Sanitation

When the water is not running and traditional sanitary infrastructure is damaged or not operating –sanitation becomes a dominant problem in a society. Deteriorating sanitation leads to the spread of water borne illnesses and chronic conditions from dysentery to cholera and typhoid.

There's also risk to the food supply as bacteria spread in an area infecting everything. In this regard, food poisoning and poisoning from other factors will increase as a common injury.

Power Outages

Without electricity we have no air-conditioning, heat, refrigeration, running water, and light. We take them for granted but the lack of those basic functions can lead to heat related injuries, cold related injuries, dehydration, and food poisoning.

The Top 10 Common Injuries

This list is a hybrid of information combining injuries defined by parts of the human body most susceptible to everyday injury, and some of the unique or more intense events we've described that can cause them to happen with greater frequency.

1. Sprains

It's common to hear that some sprains can be more painful than a broken bone. That's largely due to the damage often done to muscle tissue, ligaments and nerves. Ankles are the most common part of the body subject to sprains followed by the knees, wrists and shoulder.

Numerous events from deteriorating infrastructure to increased physical exertion will increase the frequency of sprains.

Preps for sprains

When walking through an area with any degree of rubble or rough surfaces, wear high-top boots. Leather construction boots that support the ankles are one possibility.

Choose your route wisely. If the terrain ahead of you looks like a minefield of bricks, boulders and debris –see if there's a way to walk around or circumvent the risk. First Aid supplies for sprains should include [ankle](#), [knee](#), [wrist](#) and [elbow](#) braces in addition to [elastic bandages](#).

Here's a link to the [Mayo Clinic with various treatments for sprains](#).

2. Broken Bones

Many of the events and instances that lead to a sprain could result in a broken bone. Falling is the most common cause whether it's falling through the floor of a collapsed building or falling over a branch on the ground.

Preps for broken bones

Think twice when at any distance above ground. Is the ladder supported by a reliable structure? Is the floor I'm walking on still stable and safe? Do I really need to climb high to do anything?

Avoiding situations that could lead to a fall is the best prevention.

First aid supplies for broken bones include gauze wraps, [slings](#), [splints](#), [elastic bandages](#), [plaster for casts](#), and [crutches](#).

Here's a link to the [Mayo clinic with various treatments for broken bones](#).

3. Cuts or piercings

This is one of the most common everyday injuries but it is another injury that will most likely increase in severity in addition to occurrence in a time of societal collapse. Falls often result in piercing from random debris and cuts can be caused by a range of possibilities.

These are injuries that will also increase due to the increase in physical exertion used to perform a range of tasks sometimes done by mechanical equipment.

Preps for cuts or piercings (puncture wounds)

Cuts and piercings are difficult to avoid although protective gear like leather work gloves, hardhats and coveralls can reduce exposure to sharp edges and potentially prevent piercing.

First aid supplies include [bandages](#), [topical antiseptics](#), [gauze](#) and surgical tape, [sutures and suture needles](#) or [butterfly bandages](#), and [sterile rinsing solution](#).

Here's a link to various [treatments for cuts](#) and another for [treatment of piercings](#) or puncture wounds.

4. Struck by object or against

As infrastructure deteriorates, things fall apart. Objects falling from height usually cause injury to the head, neck and shoulders. Falling onto an object can injure all parts of the body, but again the head and shoulders are most affected.

Preps for being struck by an object or against

It's hard to avoid a falling object. We usually don't see it coming. A hardhat in areas with the potential for falling debris is always a good idea. Simply looking up and avoiding areas where that could happen might be a better idea.

First aid is usually for deep bruising or concussion. Deep wounds are another possibility. First aid for being struck by an object includes cold compresses, [a wound kit for deep cuts](#), [an "Israeli" compression bandage](#), and elastic bandages

Here's a link to more information about [treating deep bruises](#) and [head injuries](#).

5. Poisoning

Poisoning has many causes from the accidental ingestion of a cleaning chemical by children to the ingestion of contaminated liquids or food by an adult.

When social norms and local agencies either cease to function or barely function, many of the chemicals and compounds kept safely away from the general public could find their way back into water sources, foods, farms and fields. Knowing the source of the poison and the amount goes a long way towards effective treatment

Preps for Poisoning

Keep all cleaning solvents and any other liquids or compounds on a high shelf out of reach of small children. Never eat or drink anything you are not sure about. Avoid eating wild plants or berries you don't recognize or are not sure about. Treat anything you eat, drink or touch with a healthy dose of skepticism and caution.

First aid for poisoning varies although Ipecac syrup to induce vomiting is sometimes prescribed. [Activated charcoal tablets](#) are another common treatment. Professional medical treatment is best if available.

Here's a link to [more information about poisoning](#). You could also try calling the National Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

6. Burns

Burns can happen a variety of ways from fire to chemical burns to burns from hot surfaces. In an environment when cooking will be common over an open-fire, and local fires may be occur with greater frequency, burns will most likely increase in frequency.

As we mentioned, the severity of the burns will also progress as people find themselves physically engaged in areas and activities that could expose them to burn dangers.

Preps for Burns

The most surprising burns are chemical burns and burns from hot surfaces. It's easy enough to see a fire and know it's hot, but chemicals and especially some chemical combinations could cause burns without warning.

Another common source of burns occurs when cooking and the active cooking that takes place if the grid is down increases the likelihood of burns from cooking. First aid for burns requires [a burn kit](#), [burn gels](#), gauze pads and gauze rolls, [burn dressings](#), and lots of cold water both to treat the burned area and to keep the burn victim hydrated.

Here's a [link to article about burn treatment](#) and a [link to a video](#).

7. Gunshot and stab wounds

If one thing is common in a time of societal collapse it's an increase in crime, violence and general civil unrest. Gunshot wounds will be common and stab wounds and injuries from assaults and robberies will increase.

Preps for Gunshot and stab wounds

The obvious advice is to avoid areas where crime or unrest commonly occur. Unfortunately, many of the victims of gunshot wounds are innocent victims far from the gunfire, and on the receiving end of a gunshot that can travel for miles.

Stabbings will most often occur during robberies or physical altercations. Blunt force trauma from weapons to baseball bats are another inevitable possibility.

[First aid for gunshot](#) wounds would require large gauze bandages, Israeli compression bandages, topical antibiotics, surgical tape, suture kit and possibly some basic surgical instruments like a hemostat.

Here's a [link to an article about how to treat gunshot wounds](#) and [a video on gunshot wound treatment](#). Also an [article about how to treat stab wounds](#).

8. Overexertion

In an environment where nothing works everyone will be working harder. Overexertion is a common injury that occurs today and will rise dramatically as some people who have led sedentary lifestyles are overwhelmed by the new physical challenges of a collapsed society.

Preps for overexertion

Pace yourself as much as possible and seek help and assistance with demanding tasks. Know your limits and prioritize what you do. Stay hydrated.

First aid for overexertion includes [electrolyte powders](#) added to water, cooling towels, aspirin to manage pain and thin the blood to increase blood flow, bed rest and a shaded area.

Here's a [link to an article about the symptoms and treatments for overexertion](#).

9. Foreign bodies

We've all had a sliver in the finger but in a time of societal collapse you can add shards of glass and even bullets to the list. Foreign bodies lodged under the skin or into the muscle are a pathway for infection and need immediate treatment.

Preps for foreign bodies

Exposed skin areas, especially hands are most vulnerable to foreign bodies. Work gloves are a first step. Bare feet are a bad idea as well. Caution around wood and timbers is a wise decision.

First aid for removing foreign bodies requires [tweezers](#), possible [a hemostat](#), a sterilized pin and in some instances, the precise use of a scalpel. Topical antibiotics and sterile rinse solutions are also used.

Here's a link to [first aid for removal of foreign bodies](#).

10. Eye injuries

An eye injury can be one of the most traumatic injuries someone can suffer. It often leads to panic if the injury is significant. Various events during a societal collapse can increase the risk for eye injuries from rampant fires to increased dust and debris in the air, and increased construction activity related to rebuilding and repair.

Preps for eye injuries

Goggles are the first step to protecting the eyes from injury. Even sunglasses offer protection. Situational awareness also helps as you avoid areas where your eyes could be exposed to substances or particles.

First aid includes the use of sterile saline solution as [eye wash](#), [eye drops](#), [eye gauze pads](#), [adhesive eye patches](#) and even an [antibiotic gel](#) that can be applied to the eyelid before an eye patch is applied.

Here's a [link to a video about treating eye injuries](#) and an [article about continuing care for eye injuries](#).

Injuries May Vary

How common any injury becomes in a time of societal breakdown depends a lot on the location and the individual. Children are the most vulnerable during difficult times in addition to the elderly and people suffering from chronic medical conditions.

We also haven't covered any of the many diseases and medical conditions that can become aggravated during a time when life is harder and medical treatments are limited or unavailable. What we've hopefully been able to do is isolate some of the physical injuries that may become more prevalent and potentially more severe.

In terms of overall planning it would be wise to think about adding some key elements to any preparations for dealing with common injuries. They would include:

- [Trauma Level First Aid Kit](#)
- [The Survival Medicine Handbook](#)
- [The U.S. Army First Aid Manual](#)
- [ACEP First Aid Manual](#)

Regardless of the direction of events, having at least these 4 items will leave you fairly well prepared for any injury you encounter regardless of the circumstances.

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