

Safety Tip of the Month – April 2007
VSI Safety Committee
“It is Just a Cut!”

How many times have you heard this from a coach, swimmer, or parent? A cut in the skin can vary from a paper cut to a life threatening deep laceration involving arterial bleeding. Skin cuts, or lacerations, typically involve pain, some blood loss, and possibly surrounding tissue damage. Furthermore, lacerations are a wide open portal for infection.

Treatment for a laceration involves direct pressure over the injured site. Any soft, clean absorbent material will work, including swimming towels and extra T-shirts. Direct pressure usually diminishes the bleeding rate so that a bandage can then be applied to the site. The bandage should be clean (not necessarily sterile) and applied firmly to help hasten the blood clotting within the laceration. Following bandage application, elevation of the injured limb, along with application of ice compresses, will help control a good bit of the pain and post-accident limb swelling. The bandage may be removed the following day, and the laceration area should be gently washed with antimicrobial liquid soap and then rinsed with warm water, and patted dry. Facial lacerations and those cuts around bony prominences may require stitches.

Keeping the laceration covered with a protective dressing will minimize the chance of an infection during the early post-injury period. It is also wise to place a small film of antibiotic ointment over the incision for the first week at home.

Proactive steps to decrease the risk of “poolside lacerations” include consistent restriction of ALL glass bottles on the pool deck, wrapping of exposed lane line metal with tape or other resilient material, timely identification and repair of broken tiles in the pool, and daily removal of all pool deck debris that is not required for swim practices. A watchful eye on the pool deck will pick up on potential laceration risks and thus prevent future bleeding injuries.