

CMC Wilderness First Aid Course Follow-Up

Scene Scenarios

In November 2018, CMC Offered a Wilderness First Aid course through NOLS Wilderness Medicine for hike leaders and trail maintainers. In an effort to promote safety and education, and to continue ongoing discussion of the information shared during the First Aid course, The CMC Education Committee will be sharing NOLS scene scenarios. The following article is adapted from an article that was originally sent via the NOLS Wilderness Medicine Scene Scenarios mailing list and is available to read in full on the NOLS Blog. It is shared here with permission. Visit the NOLS Blog at <https://blog.nols.edu> for more articles on Wilderness First Aid, Leadership, and Education.

The Scene

You are a hike leader for a CMC group of nine on an all-day hike in Turkey Pen. The rivers are up and every crossing has been wet. There is still snow alongside the trail, and the temperatures have been cold. You encouraged foot checks at your snack breaks, and changing socks to stay as warm and dry as possible. At your lunch break, you realize no one has dry socks and one of the hikers says his feet hurt. You do a foot check, and the hiker's feet are pink and cool to the touch. His feet are not swollen and there are no blisters or other soft tissue wounds or rashes. There is a white soft patch on the underside of his big right toe. He denies itching, numbness, or pins and needles sensations. He can feel light touch on the ends of all his toes, wiggle his toes, and push against resistance without increasing the pain.

Assessment

The hiker has a possible non-freezing cold injury (NFCI). He needs to dry and warm his feet. The hiker will need to rest and keep them elevated as soon as he returns to the trailhead, and can take ibuprofen 400mg every 4-6 hours for pain. If pain continues or worsens, he may need to see a physician. As the hike leader, encourage everyone to do a foot check during your lunch break. Consider decreasing the remaining distance of your hike if you are able. Continue to monitor this particular hiker for the rest of the hike, and consider plans if the hiker's foot becomes blistered or too painful to allow him to continue walking out to the trailhead.

About NFCIs

In an NFCI, it is cold enough to impair circulation, but not to freeze tissue. Nerves are especially sensitive, which accounts for the numbness, pins and needles sensations, itching, and pain that are signs of the injury. Skin will appear cold, swollen, and mottled. It is common to see cool pale extremities. This injury may progress from pins and needles to numbness, pain, and inability to walk. After warming, cool tissue can become red and swollen and be very painful. There is not much to be done in the field to treat this. We need to recognize it, keep feet dry and warm, and go to a doctor. Severe cases can result in tissue loss, moderate cases can be sensitive for weeks, months, or even years.