

SIERRA-SACRAMENTO VALLEY EMS AGENCY PROGRAM POLICY

REFERENCE NO. M-5-A

SUBJECT: GUIDELINES FOR EMS USE OF ACTIVATED CHARCOAL

PURPOSE:

This addendum is intended for the use of the base/modified base hospital in guiding the field use of activated charcoal.

Activated charcoal is an agent used for gastric decontamination following overdose ingestion. Its use is somewhat controversial as there is evidence to suggest its ability to absorb toxic agents, but there is little research supporting improvement in clinical outcomes after its administration. Previous clinical research only supports its use when given early after ingestion. Therefore, while activated charcoal may be helpful when given rapidly after an overdose, it is very important to avoid administration in cases where potential contraindications exist.

INDICATIONS:

- A. Early administration – within 1 hour of ingestion (agent still in stomach)
- B. Potentially deadly agent
- C. No effective antidote
- D. No contraindications
- E. Suggested agents where EMS administration of activated charcoal is appropriate:
 - 1. Calcium channel blockers
 - 2. Beta blockers
 - 3. Antidepressants
 - 4. Anticonvulsants
 - 5. Digoxin

CONTRAINDICATIONS:

- A. > 2 hours since ingestion
- B. Obtunded/altered level of consciousness (aspiration risk)
- C. Known caustic ingestion (acid or alkali)
- D. Known hydrocarbon ingestion
- E. Suspected GI obstruction (vomiting)

RELATIVE CONTRAINDICATION:

Agent(s) not well absorbed by activated charcoal (examples: lithium, iron, toxic alcohols)

Effective Date: 06/01/2015

Date last Reviewed/Revised: 02/2015

Next Review Date: 02/2018

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Approved:

SIGNATURE ON FILE
S-SV EMS Medical Director

SIGNATURE ON FILE
S-SV EMS Regional Executive Director