First aid for spinal injuries

The seriousness of injuries to the head, neck and spine cannot be overstated. Once the brain or spinal cord is damaged, the injury may be permanent. The brain and spinal cord do not regenerate after injury – nerve cells are not renewed.

Any casualty with a head or spinal injury, including injury to the neck, must receive urgent medical aid.

**Signs and symptoms**
- Pain at or below site of injury
- Loss of sensation, or abnormal sensation such as tingling in hands or feet
- Loss of movement or impaired movement below site of injury

**Management**

### Unconscious casualty

1. Follow DRSABCD action plan
   - **Danger** – check for Danger.
   - **Response** – check for Responsiveness.
   - **Send for help** – Send for help. Call triple zero ‘000’.
   - **Airway** – clear and open Airway.
   - **Breathing** – check for normal Breathing.
   - **CPR** – commence CPR if not breathing (30 chest compressions: 2 rescue breaths).
   - **Defibrillator** – apply Defibrillator if available and follow prompts.

2. Place unconscious casualty in recovery position, supporting neck and spine in a neutral position at all times to prevent twisting or bending movements.

3. Maintain a clear and open airway.

4. If ambulance is delayed, apply a cervical collar – if trained to do so – to minimise neck movement.

5. Ensure an ambulance has been called (triple zero ‘000’).

### Conscious casualty

1. Calm the casualty and loosen tight clothing.
2. Do not move the casualty unless in danger.
3. Support head, neck and spine in a neutral position at all times to prevent twisting or bending movements.
4. If ambulance is delayed, apply a cervical collar – if trained to do so – to minimise neck movement.
5. Ensure an ambulance has been called (triple zero ‘000’).