



What is ATLS and why is it required?

ATLS or Advanced Trauma Life Saving is a training program for physicians, physician's assistants and nurse practitioners in the management of acute trauma patients. The course was developed by the American College of Surgeons and teaches a simplified and standardized approach to trauma patient care. ATLS is widely accepted as the standard of care for initial assessment and treatment in all levels of trauma centers. It advocates that life-threatening injuries need to be treated immediately, with the most time-critical interventions performed as early as possible. The course also reinforces skills that are rarely used in rural facilities, but which are critical in a trauma situation, such as intubation and chest tube placement.

What does trauma level mean?

Level V – (30 facilities)

Level V facilities are designated by the Department of Health with assistance of staff from the Level II facilities. A Level V facility must provide evaluation, stabilization and appropriate diagnostics for each trauma patient presenting to their emergency room. When appropriate, these patients must be transferred to a higher level of care. The facility must meet specific equipment requirements. Data from each of their trauma patients must be entered into the trauma registry for statistical analysis. The patient records are audited and reviewed to assure that quality patient care is given to every trauma patient. An ATLS certified physician, physician's assistant or nurse practitioner must be available 24 hours a day to care for injured patients.

Level IV – (8 facilities)

Level IV facilities are held to the same standards as Level V, and additionally are required to have a physician rather than a physician's assistant or nurse practitioner available 24 hours a day to care for the injured patient.

Level III – (0 facilities)

Level III trauma centers are verified by the American College of Surgeons. Level III facilities do not have the full availability of physician specialists available at a Level I or II facility, but do have resources for emergency resuscitation, surgery and intensive care of most trauma patients. The same care, equipment, data entry and performance improvement requirements remain as in Level IV and V.

Level II – (5 facilities)

Level II trauma centers are verified by the American College of Surgeons. The Level II facilities in our state function at nearly the same level as a Level I facility. They attempt to assure 24 hours a day coverage of the various surgical specialists. They perform rigorous performance improvement, community education and injury prevention services. Level II Trauma Medical Directors and Coordinators within North Dakota help in the designation process for the Level IV and V facilities in the state, and providing follow-up on patient care outcomes.

Level I – (1 facilities)

Level I trauma centers are verified by the American College of Surgeons. A Level I Trauma Center provides the highest level of surgical care to trauma patients with requirements for various surgical specialists to be available 24 hours a day. There are requirements for minimum annual volumes of severely injured patients. Additionally, a Level I center has research requirements related to trauma and is a leader in trauma education, injury prevention, and is a referral resource for communities in nearby regions.