SUMMARY
A seizure is a sudden surge of electrical activity in the brain. Most seizures will stop without intervention, but the goal is to keep the individual from getting hurt during the seizure. Do not try to hold the individual or put anything in the individual’s mouth during a seizure. Call 911 if the seizure lasts more than 5 minutes. Most individuals will not have any restrictions of activities after a seizure, but this is best determined by the individual’s personal physician.

GENERAL INFORMATION
Some seizures are caused by a disease called epilepsy. But any seizure can affect how a person acts or thinks for a short time. Some individuals might have one seizure and never have another one. Seizures can look very different in different individuals. Some will lose consciousness and begin to shake in all of their limbs. These individuals might need to wear protective equipment, like a helmet, to prevent injuries. Others, while still losing consciousness, might just stare into space or repeat the same activity — such as clicking their tongue or picking at their shirt.

Seizures and epilepsy are not contagious.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE IS HAVING A SEIZURE
Most seizures will stop on their own. If you are with someone who is having a seizure, the most important thing to do is to keep the person safe. Move anything that the person could hit themselves on (like furniture). If the person has lost consciousness and you are able to do so, turn the person onto their side once the seizure has stopped. Never put anything into the mouth of a person who is having a seizure. This includes food, medication, and your hands. You might hear that a person having a seizure can “swallow their own tongue.” This is physically impossible.

If you can, time how long the person is having the seizure. Call 911 if you feel uncomfortable, if this is their first seizure, or if the seizure lasts longer than 5 minutes. If a patient has a known seizure disorder, they might not need to go to a hospital, but let a health care professional like the emergency responders make that determination.

The most common cause of someone with epilepsy having a seizure is missing their medication. Sleep deprivation, eating poorly, or being dehydrated also can trigger a seizure.

DO PEOPLE WITH SEIZURES HAVE RESTRICTIONS?
This is best answered by the individual’s personal physician. If an individual is still having uncontrolled seizures, they likely would be restricted in certain activities such as driving and using firearms, although some restrictions are specific to the state in which the individual lives. Individuals with epilepsy should not swim unsupervised. Most sports, even contact sports, are safe. But if seizures are uncontrolled, activities like scuba diving and rock climbing can be dangerous and should be avoided.

RESOURCES
- Epilepsy Foundation: www.epilepsy.com
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Epilepsy: www.cdc.gov/epilepsy/index.html
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/seizures/Pages/Epilepsy-in-Children-Diagnosis-and-Treatment.aspx