

When to Call 9-1-1

Care Provider Bulletin

July 2018



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Medical Emergencies

Here are some tips to assist you in deciding when to call 911. Do call 911 when:

- The condition is life or limb threatening
- The condition could worsen quickly on the way to the hospital
- Moving the victim will cause further injury
- The person needs skills, medication or equipment right away that paramedics carry
- Distance or traffic would delay transporting the person to the hospital and could be life threatening

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you or the person you support experience any of the following:

- Severe difficulty breathing, especially that does not improve with rest
- Chest pain
- A fast heartbeat (more than 120-150) at rest, especially if associated with shortness of breath or feeling faint
- You witness someone faint/pass out or someone is unresponsive/unconscious
- Difficulty speaking, numbness, or weakness of any part of the body
- Sudden dizziness, weakness or mental changes (confusion, very odd behavior, difficulty walking/standing)
- Sudden blindness or vision changes
- Heavy bleeding from the mouth, nose, ear, vagina or rectum that continues
- Bleeding from any wound that will not stop with direct pressure
- Broken bones visible through an open wound
- Extremely hot or cold body temperature and the person appears ill or less responsive
- Drowning/Near drowning
- Choking
- Severe burns (2nd and 3rd degree)
- Poisoning
- Drug overdose
- New severe headache
- Sudden intense severe pain
- Someone makes a credible threat to hurt or kill themselves or someone else
- Allergic reaction, especially if there is any difficulty breathing
- Seizures that last over 5 minutes, person appears unusual or is injured



Remember, you are the best judge of the situation. Do call someone when you are concerned enough to think about calling 911.

Other situations when you should call 9-1-1

- Any crime in progress (robbery, burglary, prowler, fights, etc.)
- Any type of fire (structure, vehicle, brush, etc.)
- A vehicle collision, especially if someone is injured
- When you or the person you care for feels at risk.

Did you know?

- Emergencies are situations where law enforcement, firefighters, or medical help is needed right away.
- People may die if immediate medical care is needed but not available.
- You may have the ability to save a life.
- Understanding client conditions can help save lives.
- 9-1-1 is for emergencies only. Know when to call 9-1-1 and when to seek other types of help.

Providing Information to 9-1-1

Stay calm when calling 9-1-1. Be ready to answer questions from the 9-1-1 dispatcher:

- The location of the emergency. If you do not know the address, look for landmarks, street signs, or buildings.
- The phone number you are calling from.
- The nature of the emergency (such as medical, fire, crime). Providing this information will help them determine which responder to send.
- Details about the emergency.

Dispatchers are routing your call while getting information from you. As you provide more details, they send the information to the first responders.

Do not hang up until the dispatcher tells you to.

Waiting for First Responders

- Follow any instructions the 9-1-1 dispatcher gives you while waiting for first responders to arrive.
- If a bleeding wound is evident, apply direct pressure to the wound using cloth or bandages.
- If it is nighttime, turn on the lights to make it easier for first responders to find you.
- If the person has Advanced Directives, power of attorney or other legal documents about their wishes for care for the paramedics or hospital, have them ready.

Other Information

- If you or someone you support calls 9-1-1 by mistake, do not hang up. Stay on the line and explain that everything is okay and there is not an emergency.
- If you do not speak English, interpreter services are available in some areas when calling 9-1-1.
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, 9-1-1 centers in most counties are equipped with TTY devices. You may also be able to use Video or IP Relay Services in your county.
- Many counties allow 9-1-1 text messaging from mobile phones. Calling 9-1-1 directly is still the most reliable and preferred method of contact. Texting 9-1-1 can be used when you are unable to make a phone call due to safety or communication methods. If your area is not able to receive 9-1-1 texts, you will receive a 'bounce-back' message.
- Smart911 is a service that allows you to add key information about members of a household that would help anyone you care for in the event of an emergency, whether the call is from the home or any mobile phone. You can add information such as who lives in the house, descriptions, photos, medical conditions, allergies, disability and equipment information, medications used. Visit <https://www.smart911.com/> to learn more information, and see if the service is available in your area, and sign up.

Non-Emergencies

- If you need help, but it is not an emergency, contact your doctor or seek assistance at urgent care for medical issues.
- Most law enforcement agencies have non-emergency numbers you can call to report a crime.

If you are unsure if your situation is an emergency, call 9-1-1.

The 9-1-1 dispatcher will help determine if emergency assistance is needed.



Sources & Resources:

- **King County, The Basics of Calling 9-1-1:** <https://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/executive-services/emergency-management/e-911-program/911-basics-en.ashx?la=en>
- **National 9-1-1 Program, Frequently Asked Questions:** https://www.911.gov/frequently_asked_questions.html
- **NENA, Top 10 Tips for Calling 9-1-1:** <https://www.nena.org/page/911TipsGuidelines?>
- **American College of Emergency Physicians, When to Call 9-1-1:** <http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/Emergency-101/>
- **Federal Communications Commission, Text to 9-1-1: What You Need to Know:** <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/what-you-need-know-about-text-911>
- **Smart911:** <https://www.smart911.com/>