

Ask Amy

Calling 911 for Medical Emergencies

Is it OK to call 911 if I think somebody needs medical help and what should I expect when I do call? MT, Utica, NY

Many medical calls we receive at the 911 center typically are not true emergencies therefore may not need a trip by ambulance to the emergency room but instead, may be handled outside the emergency services system. Precious limited resources are wasted on non-emergencies that can be handled routinely. Minor illnesses and injuries can be handled by your family physician or an urgent care facility and do not require an ambulance trip to the emergency room.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary definitions;

emergency *noun* : an unexpected and usually dangerous situation that calls for immediate action

emergency room *noun* : a hospital room or area staffed and equipped for the reception and treatment of persons with conditions (as illness or trauma) requiring immediate medical care

ambulance *noun* : a vehicle used for taking hurt or sick people to the hospital especially in emergencies

In case you do happen to be put in the position to call 911 for a medical emergency, we want you to be prepared as to what to expect. We understand that you may be upset, panicked or afraid, but we ask that you try to remain calm and cooperate with the call-taker, answering all the questions as best as you can.

As dispatchers, we are trained in Emergency Medical Dispatch ©Priority Dispatch Corp. which is a system used to gather information from the caller to identify the need for pre-arrival instructions and prioritize the EMS response. In other words, the dispatcher is going to ask you many questions. Some may seem irrelevant, but it is important to remain focused and answer the

questions to the best of your ability. These questions are aimed at determining the problem and how bad it is while also determining if there are any instructions he/she can provide to assist until help arrives.

The first question will be the location of the emergency. The address including house number and street, apartment, lot number, cross streets or common places are all important in helping the fire department and ambulance locate you.

The next question will be the phone number you are calling from. This is important in case the connection is lost or the dispatcher needs to re-contact you for further information.

Then comes the all important “OK, tell me exactly what happened.” As call-takers, we are looking for a short explanation of the problem that prompted you to make the call. The dispatcher does not need medical history or what happened in the past unless it is a safety issue. Additional information can be given to the responders when they arrive on the scene.

After these basic questions, the dispatcher will ask you more specific questions directed at obtaining information to assist the responders with what equipment they need to bring. Also, the dispatcher may be able to give you step by step instructions on how to assist the patient until help arrives such as CPR, bleeding control or the Heimlich Maneuver. Again, these questions may seem irrelevant and time consuming but are *proven* to aid both the responders and the victims until the responders get there.

To sum it all up:

- Only call for true emergencies requiring immediate rescue and ambulance response
- Try to remain calm and cooperative
- Answer all questions as best as you can
- Follow all instructions given to aid the patient until help arrives
- Stay safe and healthy!