

## Do You Know When to Call an Ambulance?

### How to Recognize Emergencies

How do you tell the difference between a true emergency and a minor problem? Certain symptoms are so alarming that the need for emergency care – or even an ambulance is obvious. But what should you do about more common illnesses and injuries?

Only a doctor can diagnose medical problems. But, you can protect your family's health by learning to recognize certain symptoms.

Know which symptoms to watch for. The following are warning signs of a medical emergency:

- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- Chest or upper abdominal pain or pressure
- Fainting
- Sudden dizziness, weakness or change in vision
- Change in mental status (such as unusual behavior, confusion, difficulty arousing)
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Bleeding that won't stop
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings

You should also be familiar with the symptoms of common illnesses and injuries.

Ask what you should do if you think someone in your family needs emergency care. Should you call the doctor's office first? Should you go straight to the emergency department? What should you do when the doctor's office is closed?

Trust your instincts. Parents are usually good at recognizing signs of unusual behavior or other symptoms that indicate an emergency. Many other medical problems, or state of mind, can make an otherwise minor medical problem an "emergency."

### When to Call an Ambulance

When should you call an ambulance instead of driving to the emergency department? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the victim's condition life-threatening?
- Could the victim's condition worsen and become life-threatening on the way to the hospital?
- Could moving the victim cause further injury?
- Does the victim need the skills or equipment of emergency medical providers?
- Would distance or traffic conditions cause a delay in getting the victim to the hospital?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes" or if you are unsure, it's best to call an ambulance. This is true even though you can sometimes get to the hospital faster by driving than calling an ambulance. Emergency medical providers communicate with the physician in the emergency department and can initiate further life-saving support if the patient's condition should deteriorate.

If you live in a community with a single emergency number, calling for help is easy. Just dial 9-1-1. If your community does not have the 9-1-1 emergency number, **keep the numbers of the fire, police and emergency medical services near your telephone.** When you call for help, speak calmly and clearly. Give your name, the address, phone number, location of victim (such as upstairs in the bedroom), and nature of the problem. Don't hang up until the dispatcher tells you to do so. They may need additional information or need to give you further instructions.

When in doubt, DON'T GUESS, call **EMS!!**



Division of Public Health

