

# When To Call 911

Government websites advertise calling 9-1-1 to "*Stop a crime! Report a fire! Save a life!*" This is because calling this number usually triggers a tiered response by the local police department, fire department, and emergency medical services (EMS) agency.

Here we will focus on the "Save a life" portion of 9-1-1 which is the portion that activates the EMS system of first responders, emergency medicine technicians (EMT), and paramedics, depending on your location. "To save a life" refers to calling 9-1-1 when there is a medical emergency.

## What is a Medical Emergency?

A medical emergency is an event that you reasonably believe threatens your or someone else's life or limb in such a manner that immediate medical care is needed to prevent death or serious impairment of health. A medical emergency includes severe pain, bad injury, a serious illness, or a medical condition that is quickly getting much worse. To help you decide if you should call 9-1-1 answer these questions (as best you can):

- Is the condition life or limb threatening?
- Could the condition worsen quickly on the way to the hospital?
- If you move the victim, will it cause further injury?
- Does the person need skills or equipment that paramedics or EMT's carry right away?
- Would distance or traffic cause a delay in getting the person to the hospital?

If the answer is yes to any of these....**call 9-1-1.**

## What if I'm not sure?

If you're not sure about the answer to the above questions, call 9-1-1 and the trained dispatcher will help advise you. It is better to be safe and let the 9-1-1 call taker determine if you need emergent assistance. Always err on the side of caution. When in doubt, call.

## If you are experiencing *any of the following*, call 9-1-1 immediately

- 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 (comatose)
- Difficulty speaking, numbness, or weakness of any part of the body

- Sudden dizziness, weakness or mental changes (confusion, very odd behavior, difficulty walking)
- Sudden blindness or vision changes
- Heavy bleeding from your mouth, nose, vagina or bottom
- Bleeding from any wound that won't stop with direct pressure
- Broken bones visible through an open wound, or a broken leg
- Drowning
- Choking
- Severe burns
- Allergic reaction, especially if there is any difficulty breathing
- Extremely hot or cold
- Poisoning or drug overdose
- New severe headache
- Sudden intense severe pain
- Someone is threatening to hurt or kill themselves or someone else

## Who will answer my call and what information will they want?

9-1-1 calls are answered by trained dispatchers who will ask you questions to determine what kind of help you need. As soon as you call, a response is in action but *you must stay on the line to answer more questions* until the dispatcher tells you to hang up. You may be asked:

- What happened?
- Where are you? (Be specific. This is especially important if you are using a cell phone as the dispatcher may not be able to track your exact location like is possible when you use a land-line)
- What is your name?
- What is your phone number?

## I've called 9-1-1, what should I do while I wait?

- Answer all the 9-1-1 call taker's questions.
- Apply direct pressure to a bleeding wound with whatever cloth/bandages you have
- If it is at night, turn on the lights in your home, to make it easier for the ambulance to find you
- If you're on a cell phone, make sure to give the call-taker EXACT information on your location
- If you or the other person has Advanced Directives, power of attorney or other legal documents about their wishes for care from the paramedics or hospital, please have these ready when help arrives.

## What if I call 9-1-1 by mistake?

If you call by mistake, **do not hang up**, just stay on the line and tell the dispatcher that everything is OK. If you hang up, they may send a police officer or fire truck to your location to investigate if there is a problem.