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Things to consider before you call an Ambulance

If it is an emergency you can call an Ambulance anytime (Call 000).



Considerations before you are in an emergency situation

It is useful to consider the following before you are in an emergency situation.

1. Paramedics are highly trained health professionals who are able to come to your home, assess the person you are caring for, and tell you what may be causing the emergency and/or recommend potential treatments. Just because you call an ambulance does not mean they will take the person to hospital. The person, or you if you are the substitute decision-maker, will be given all the options and be able to make an informed choice about what kind of care you want.





2. The person that you are caring for can refuse treatment from the paramedic and they can refuse to be transported to a hospital. If the person is unconscious or unable to make and communicate decisions, the substitute decision-maker will need to decide on whether to refuse treatment, resuscitation, or transport. It would be helpful if you and the person's substitute decision-maker (if both are different), have discussed these types of scenarios. If the person has an Advance Care Plan then this may be helpful in deciding what to do.

3. Not all paramedics are specialists in end-of-life care. You are always able to advocate strongly for the person's wishes. It will be easier if you have written documentation outlining the person's wishes (in the form of a DNR, Goals of Care form, Advance Care Plan, or an Advance Care Directive) so keep this information in an easily accessed location.
4. In relation to treatment and transport to hospital consider:
 - Does the person want to prolong their life?
 - If the person is close to dying, where would they like their last hours or days to be?
 - If the person wants to be at home, are you able to keep them comfortable (do you have necessary medicines, equipment, and the physical and emotional capacity to do so).
 - Are you willing to keep the person at home? It is okay to transport the person to hospital if you are overwhelmed or unwilling to provide further care at this time.
5. Which hospital is the person going to be transferred to? Sometimes the paramedic will not be able to tell you until they are already on route (as it depends where there is availability).



6. Can you travel with the person in the ambulance? You may want to be with them, but also consider how you will be able to get home again.
7. If the person is actively dying, and this is expected, you can still call an ambulance for support but it may be more helpful to call your treating doctor, palliative care team, or palliative care advice line.
8. Prepare ahead for an emergency – Develop an emergency plan and keep an emergency bag packed in case. This may include pyjamas, underwear, toiletries, medicines and medicine list, a copy of the Advance Care Plan (or similar documents) and any other special items.



Situations in which you may consider calling an ambulance

You can call an ambulance anytime if it is an emergency. You may also call an ambulance if:

- The person has had a fall and you cannot get them up.
- The person has uncontrolled symptoms (such as pain or breathlessness) that are causing distress and you are not sure what to do.
- The person is confused or delirious and behaving in a way that results in them or yourself being unsafe.
- After the person has died, you may call the ambulance for support or to obtain information about what needs to be done. Paramedics may be able to legally verify the death depending on their jurisdiction. You will need a verification of death certificate in order for the funeral director to be able to move the body. The official death certificate will be organised by the funeral director and a doctor (usually the GP).

Reaching out to other services for help

Depending on the time of day and the seriousness of the situation, you may also like to call:

- The treating doctor, palliative care team or General Practitioner – check their office hours or use the after-hours number if one has been provided.
- The virtual emergency department in your state or territory (if there is one).
- The relevant state or territory palliative care advice line.

Please note that in some states and territories, calling an ambulance may incur a fee if the patient is not covered by a concession or ambulance subscription.



Palliative care advice lines:

- **SA Palliative Care Connect**
Phone: 1800 725 548 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4pm)
- **VIC Palliative Care Advisory Service**
Phone: 1800 360 000 (Daily, 7am to 10pm)
- **QLD Pal Assist**
Phone: 1800 722 273 (Daily, 7am to 7pm)
- **TAS After-hours helpline / GP Assist**
Phone: (03) 6165 2348 (Daily, 6pm to 7:45am)
- **NSW, ACT, WA, NT (National) Healthdirect helpline**
Phone: 1800 022 222 (24 hours)