

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES: When to call and what to expect, when you dial 9-1-1 and, what to do before help arrives.

©2003 ASHI/NAED.

9-1-1

It is estimated that on the average, every individual in the U.S. or Canada will call for emergency assistance at least twice during their lifetime. Fear and helplessness can be reduced or eliminated by knowing when to call and what to expect when you phone 9-1-1. That is the purpose of this complimentary brochure produced by two nationally recognized training organizations, the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch and the American Safety & Health Institute.

9-1-1 Background

The 9-1-1 emergency number got its start in the 1970's as a way for people to get assistance more easily. Before the use of 9-1-1, people had to use a 7-digit number to call for help. Time spent looking up emergency numbers, panicked misdialing, and failure to accurately verify the true location of the emergency, often caused unnecessary delays in getting help. Today, as a testament to success of the 9-1-1 program, nearly 93% of all municipalities in the US have implemented this service [source: The National Emergency Number Association (NENA)]. Additionally, many now have enhanced, computerized systems that instantly provide the dispatcher with the address and telephone number of the caller if you are calling from a traditional phone. In the future, cell phones will also have this capability, but for now it is your responsibility to identify your location by a street name, a street number, a landmark, or directions. You must try your best to relay this information to the 9-1-1 operator if calling from a cell phone.

What To Expect When You Call 9-1-1

Typically, a professional emergency dispatcher with specialized training to deal with crises over the phone will answer your call to 9-1-1. Be prepared to briefly explain what your exact situation is. Many dispatchers today are trained to provide real-time instruction in CPR and life-saving first aid while simultaneously dispatching Emergency Medical Service (EMS) professionals to your location. Listen to the dispatcher and follow their instructions.

Most public safety agencies have access to a variety of highly trained personnel, specialized equipment, and vehicles. To ensure that the right people with the right equipment are sent to the correct location, the 9-1-1 dispatcher must ask you specific questions. Sometimes in an emergency, it may seem like these questions are being asked to determine whether or not you need help. In actuality, they are being asked to determine the level of help you need. Remember, trained dispatchers never ask questions that are unnecessary.

The dispatcher will always ask you to say the address of the emergency and your callback number for verification. Having you say it to them (or say it twice if they don't have a computerized 9-1-1 screen) must always be done to be sure it is heard and

copied down correctly by the dispatcher. They know how important it is to do it "right" and not just "fast".

There are four universal questions the dispatcher needs in order to put their knowledge and experience to work for you quickly and effectively after the address and callback telephone number of the emergency have been verified as correct:

- Person's problem or the type of incident ("Tell me exactly what happened?").
- Approximate age.
- Is he or she conscious?
- Is he or she breathing?

Remember to discuss with your children when and how to call 9-1-1 so that they can get help if they are ever in need. Do not tell your children to dial "Nine-Eleven" Since there is no "eleven" on the telephone keypad, this phrasing may confuse the child in an emergency. Always teach "Nine- one-one" as the emergency number.

Getting this critical information from the caller typically takes less than 30 seconds. After that, you may be asked to do nothing, get out of an unsafe environment, or stay on the line and assist in providing care for the ill or injured person. Working with 9-1-1 callers, EMDs who are dispatchers trained to provide telephone instruction in CPR and life-saving first aid have helped to save thousands of lives during the first five to ten minutes it usually takes EMS professionals to arrive. In all cases, remember the most important thing you can do when calling 9-1-1 is to LISTEN CAREFULLY. Always do whatever the dispatcher asks you to do. Don't tell them to "hurry". They already know that. Every question they ask has an important reason. That's why it's in their protocol.

Dialing 9-1-1 On A Cell Phone

The use of cellular phones to activate EMS is growing very quickly. However, at the current time, wireless technology is ahead of public service capabilities.

It is important to know that the system that identifies a caller's location and telephone number currently does not work with wireless phones. This makes it difficult or impossible to send help to people who cannot identify their location. If you are calling from a cell phone and do not know your location, the dispatcher will work with you to help determine your exact location or where to send help.

A federal government project is underway to make sure calls for help made from cell phones in the United States will be routed to the closest public safety agency for proper dispatch and that their location can be more accurately determined.

Finally

It is highly recommended that you take a certified course in CPR and first aid. Even when highly trained dispatchers (EMDs) and EMS professionals are readily accessible in the community, prompt, properly administered first aid care still can mean the difference between life and death, rapid vs. prolonged recovery, and temporary vs.

permanent disability. These courses are available through authorized **American Safety and Health Institute** Training Centers and other nationally recognized organizations.

In summary, simply knowing when to call and what to expect when you phone 9-1-1 can help reduce fear and helplessness in an emergency. When calling 9-1-1, keep in mind that the most important thing you can do is to LISTEN CAREFULLY and DO EXACTLY what the dispatcher asks you to do. Emergency service professionals are normally always available to assist you through times of crisis, confusion, and distress. Let them be your lifeline.