



What to Expect When You Call 911

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Roughly 240 million (<https://www.nena.org/?page=911Statistics>) calls are made to 911 in the United States each year—many for health emergencies (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/When-Your-Child-Needs-Emergency-Medical-Services.aspx>) involving children. It can be hard to think about your child being sick or hurt badly enough to need emergency medical services (EMS), but these things do happen.



Be prepared in case you ever need to call 911 and know what to expect when you do; this can help rescue crews get there as quickly as possible to help.

911: 3 digits, many systems

There are different types of EMS systems depending on where you live. Some are combined with the fire department. Ambulances and other emergency transport teams may work through either public or private services.

What's your emergency?

When you call 911, the dispatch operator will ask you a series of important questions that usually begin with, "What's your emergency?"

- **Be calm.** Try to be patient as you answer questions about your child's condition and medical history. The questions allow 911 responders to send the right type of EMS providers and transportation. Know that as operators are gathering information, they are sending it to the dispatcher in real time.
- **Know your location.** Calls from a land line usually show the dispatch center the exact address of the place you are calling from. However, at least 70% of 911 calls now come from cell phones (<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/911-wireless-services>). Since many areas of the country do not yet have the enhanced 911 technology needed for EMS systems to pinpoint the exact location of mobile phone callers, the operator may need your help to find you. If you are in an unfamiliar place, like when traveling, try to take note of the address, nearby streets, or landmarks, and be ready to give the 911 operator as many details as possible.
- **Stay on the line.** Don't hang up until the rescue crew arrives. The operator may want to walk you through giving first-aid (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/First-Aid-Guide.aspx>) or CPR (</English/news/Pages/AAP-Advocates-for-Life-Support-Training-Children-Adults.aspx>) if necessary, or tell you if you should move to a safer location until help arrives.
 - **If you get disconnected:** If calling 911 from a cell phone, provide your wireless number so the operator can call back if the call drops.

Types of EMS providers

When you call 911, there are different levels of providers who come to your aid. These include:

- **First responders**, usually firefighters or police officers, can give basic first-aid care and CPR for adults, children and infants.
- **Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs)** can do a little more than first responders. They may be able to assist giving a patient's own epinephrine autoinjector (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/How-to-use-an-Epinephrine-Auto-Injector.aspx>) for a severe allergic reaction, for example, or help patients use their own

inhaler (/English/health-issues/conditions/allergies-asthma/Pages/Asthma-Inhalers.aspx) for an asthma attacks. They can also help patients who may have trouble breathing with oxygen and equipment called a bag valve mask. [Back to Top](#)

- **Paramedics** have higher-level training to give certain life-saving medications through intravenous (IV) catheters in a vein, with an injection (shot), or by mouth. Paramedics can also place breathing tubes to help people having trouble breathing, for example, and use defibrillators (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Using-an-AED.aspx) to restart the heart with electricity.

Which hospital will the ambulance go to?

Depending on your location and situation, parents may be able to choose which hospital the rescue crew transports their child to for treatment in the emergency department (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/10-Things-for-Parents-to-Know-Before-Heading-to-the-ER.aspx). However, EMS systems often have regional and specialty hospitals that are designated for different types of illnesses and injuries. These include pediatric trauma centers (/English/news/Pages/AAP-Offers-Recommendations-to-Improve-Caring-for-Pediatric-Trauma.aspx) or children's hospitals equipped with the resources and staff available for a child's specific treatment needs. Small babies, for example, may need to go to hospitals specializing in infant care. Sometimes, this may not be the closest hospital to your location.

Future improvements to 911

EMS answering centers across the United States are transitioning to upgraded digital technology known as Next Generation 911 (<https://www.911.gov/ng911movie.html>). Eventually, this will allow families to text or even send photos and video to 911. Texting during an emergency could be helpful when it's available if you are unable to hear well or talk without putting yourself in danger. But if you are able to make a voice call to 911, and if it is safe to do so, the Federal Communications Commission (<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/text-911-quick-facts-faqs>) advises that you should always make a voice call to 911.

EMS during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic EMS staff will likely arrive wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and the community at large from spreading the SARS-CoV-2 virus. PPE includes face masks (N-95), goggles, and gloves. This may seem scary to younger children at first, so it's good to prepare your child for this, or distract younger children on the way to the hospital.

Families and children over age 2 should wear face masks (/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx) themselves during transport, too. The hospital (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/What-to-Expect-If-Your-Child-is-Admitted-to-the-Hospital.aspx) also will have precautions in place to help prevent the spread of the virus.

Remember...

The 911 system is available around-the-clock to help provide the best emergency response for your child. If your child is seriously hurt or sick, trust your instincts to call 911. It's the safest and fastest way to get your child life-saving care they need.

And...if you or your child calls 911 by mistake, **do not hang up**. Just stay on the line.

More information:

- Is It a Medical Emergency, or Not? (/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Is-It-a-Medical-Emergency-or-Not.aspx)
- When to Call Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/When-to-Call-Emergency-Medical-Services-EMS.aspx)
- 10 Things for Parents to Know Before Heading to the ER (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/10-Things-for-Parents-to-Know-Before-Heading-to-the-ER.aspx)
- What to Expect if Your Child is Admitted to the Hospital (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/What-to-Expect-If-Your-Child-is-Admitted-to-the-Hospital.aspx)

Equipment for Ground Ambulances (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/3/e919>) (AAP Policy Statement)

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Last Updated 4/23/2021

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