

Calling an ambulance: Your questions answered

If someone is unwell, never be afraid to pass the problem over to someone else. If in doubt, call 000 and ask for an ambulance.

Making the call for an ambulance can be stressful. Understanding how the process works can make it less intimidating and ensure you get a fast,

appropriate response. These 10 commonly asked questions are things a paramedic would like you to know.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR

Why do they ask so many questions when I call an ambulance?

When you call for an ambulance, it is important to understand that the call-taker is not a paramedic. As a result, they are required to follow a set sequence of questions to ensure the safety of all concerned. For the process to work quickly and efficiently, it is crucial that you stay calm and answer questions in order.

The first few questions are the most important as they will trigger an immediate response:

- **Are they conscious?**
- **Are they breathing?**

If the call-taker believes the situation is life-threatening, even though they may continue to ask questions, an ambulance will be immediately dispatched. If further questions provide information that the call is not as serious as first thought, the responding ambulance will be downgraded or possibly even cancelled. Callers often get agitated by the constant questioning, as they don't understand that help is already on the way.

Do I have to give my personal information when I call an ambulance?

No, you can call an ambulance anonymously if you wish. The call-taker may ask your name, but that is simply so they can use it when they are assisting you. If you are calling from a mobile they are likely to ask you for the number you are calling on so if the call drops out, they can call you back.

Do I have to stay on scene if I've called an ambulance?

You are not legally required to remain at the scene if you have called an ambulance, however, it is important for someone to stay to assist in keeping the patient safe until further care arrives if at all possible. If a danger appears and it is not safe to stay, get yourself to safety and inform emergency services.

What should I do while I am waiting for an ambulance?

Provided it is safe to do so, it is important that someone stays with the patient and remains on the phone to the 000 operator until the ambulance arrives. If you are alone in a house or other building, quickly unlock the front door and turn a light on and return to the patient. If there is more than one person present, get them to wait out the front so the paramedics can be met and directed. This is the same if you are outside or in a public place, one person should remain with the patient and other friends can assist by meeting and directing the paramedics. Clear instructions for locations outside are very important.

It is also helpful to gather up any medications the patient may be taking and some identification if you can find it.

If CPR is required, you will be talked through the process by the call-taker, so stay on the line until help arrives.

Medical Disclaimer

The information provided on this fact sheet is provided for information purposes only. As such it **cannot substitute for the advice of a medical professional**

First published April 2019

Calling an ambulance: Your questions answered

I asked for an ambulance, why is the fire brigade here?

To ensure a rapid response to life-threatening medical emergencies, other services can sometimes be sent to an incident, e.g., fire services in Victoria have been trained in the First Responder model. Fire officers, as well as police officers (if they are already on scene), are able to provide basic life support, including defibrillation, to a patient. Even if they arrive with the ambulance, they may still remain to assist with CPR and lifting. It is important that the ambulance service, fire brigade and law enforcement work together to save lives by reducing response times.

Why is there only a single paramedic?

Research has shown us that rapid response and care can make all the difference to patient outcomes. To ensure adequate resources, single officers are often responded to initiate care. They may be in a car, on a motorbike or even a pushbike at public events! But don't worry, they are always backed up by at least one crew of two members who will further manage and transport a patient if required.

I asked for an ambulance, why are the police here?

It's an unfortunate fact of life that paramedics can be threatened with violence when they attend emergency situations. People are stressed and emotional and when alcohol and other drugs are added to the mix, things can escalate quickly.

Don't be concerned if police arrive with paramedics, they are only there to ensure crew safety. Remember, if someone needs an ambulance due to alcohol or other drugs it is a medical emergency. Police are not there to arrest anyone, simply to ensure paramedics can go home safely at the end of their shift.

Why do paramedics like to leave doors open?

Paramedics spend their shifts going into unknown environments on the worst day of people's lives. Even 'good' people can react unpredictably. Don't take it personally, but paramedics may have to get out of rooms and buildings quickly when necessary, so please don't shut doors behind them!

Will I get a bill?

One of the biggest concerns that young people have about calling an ambulance is getting a bill. Ambulance attendance is fee for service, so there is generally a bill anytime one attends. The bill however applies to the patient, not the person who called.

The following general rules apply:

- **If you are on a pension or health care card, you will not be billed**
- **If you have private health insurance that includes ambulance cover, the bill will be paid by the fund**
- **If you have an ambulance subscription, you will not be billed**

It is important to find out from your parents if your family has ambulance cover. Even if you don't, never avoid calling an ambulance due to worries about receiving a bill. Bills can be paid, lives are irreplaceable.

Will you always transport a patient to hospital?

Whether or not a patient is taken to hospital will be determined by how unwell the patient is and the paramedic's assessment of their safety. If an ambulance is called to look after a young person who is affected by alcohol or other drugs but, after treating them, the paramedic decides they do not need to go to hospital, they will ensure they are safe and in the care of a responsible adult. Whilst the ambulance service is not a taxi service, paramedics would never leave a young person in an unsafe situation.