

Calling an ambulance for someone who is drunk

Alcohol is a common part of some people's celebrations, but when someone drinks too much, things can get serious very quickly. If you need to call an ambulance, it can be overwhelming, especially if you don't know what will happen. The following tips explain what happens when you call an ambulance for someone who is alcohol affected.

Helping a drunk friend can be difficult and potentially dangerous. Often, the person may be aggressive and uncooperative. While it is important to try to keep your friend safe, the first priority must always be your personal safety. Never be afraid to pass the problem over to someone else, particularly if they become violent. If in doubt, call 000.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU ARE A FRIEND, NOT A DOCTOR

What will they ask me when I call?

You can call 000 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from any landline, pay phone or mobile. The call is always free and you can even call if you don't have any credit or the mobile is locked. The operator will ask basic questions about where you are and what the problem is before deciding if you need an ambulance. The specific questions can be found here [Calling 000 for a medical emergency](#).

The important things to remember are:

- **stay calm**
- **answer the questions as best you can and**
- **stay on the line, as the call-taker can help you with advice until the ambulance arrives**

Will they ask for my details?

You can always call an ambulance anonymously if you wish. The call-taker may ask for your first name, but that is only 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, but this is simply so they can call you back if the line drops out.

How long will it take for the ambulance to arrive?

This depends on many factors, including how unwell the patient is, how close the available resources are and how good your location information is. If an emergency response is required however, most ambulances in metropolitan areas will arrive in under twelve minutes. This can feel like forever, but the

call-taker will stay on the phone to assist you and talk you through any concerns you may have.

It is important that you do not panic and start trying to drive people when waiting for an ambulance. The paramedics are likely to find you far faster if you remain where you are.

What should I do while I'm waiting?

One person must always stay with the patient and stay on the line to 000. The safest position for anyone affected by alcohol is on their side, so ensure the person remains on their side while you are waiting. If you have more than one person at the scene, send someone to meet the ambulance. It will make it easier and faster for them to find you. When they arrive, the paramedics may ask everyone else to move away while they assess, but this is for privacy and safety reasons. Whoever knows the most about the patient should remain nearby to answer questions.

What sort of questions will they ask?

The paramedics only ask for information they need to treat a patient and stay safe themselves. They also understand people are stressed and upset when they arrive, so just try to relax, stay calm and answer truthfully. Some of the questions you may be asked include:

- **What has happened tonight?** Give a brief description of what happened
- **Have they been drinking alcohol or taking any substances?** Be as honest as you can. It is a

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**

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medical emergency and quick information will help paramedics keep your friend safe. Nobody will get into trouble. A paramedic is only there to ensure the patient's safety

■ Does the patient have any medical conditions? Are they allergic to anything?

This is good information to know about friends you hang out with, so it's worth telling your friends if you have medical conditions in case something happens.

■ Have you given them anything to help?

It's always best not to give anything to a patient when waiting for an ambulance, but if you have, be sure to let the paramedics know.

■ Can you write down your friend's details?

When paramedics treat a patient, it helps if they have their details. Don't be worried about giving this information, it is purely for medical treatment and is confidential. Things like name, address, phone number and date of birth are really helpful. Include medical details if you know them.

■ Who else is in the house/around the scene?

Paramedics may ask this only to ensure they are safe. Every job is an unknown environment and they like to know who they are dealing with.

The paramedic is asking personal questions about my friend. I don't want to break their confidence.

When a paramedic asks questions about a patient's health or what they have taken, it is on a need-to-know basis and is strictly confidential. It is important that they know what they are dealing with as quickly as possible, so they can treat the patient effectively. Please be honest, it is a medical emergency and your answers can help save your friend's life.

What will paramedics do to look after a drunk person?

The main concern for paramedics caring for a drunk person is their airway. If someone loses their 'gag reflex' they are no longer able to swallow properly, cough or vomit. That means they are at a very real risk of choking and dying if their airway is not looked after. The most basic way to do this is by placing the patient in the recovery position (on their side) to allow any liquid to drain out. Sometimes, this is enough to keep their airway clear, but if they are drunk enough, they may need a tube down their throat to ensure they can breathe safely. Once the

paramedics have ensured the patient can breathe properly and any injuries are taken care of, they will transport them to hospital for further care.

When they get to the hospital the patient will be closely monitored and possibly placed on an intravenous (IV) drip to help with rehydration.

If I call an ambulance for my friend, will you call their parents?

Paramedics never routinely call anyone, it's not their job. If they need more information to treat someone, further questions may be asked, but they do not routinely inform parents of their attendance.

If someone under the age of 16 is taken to an emergency department (ED) in need of care, the hospital will usually contact their next of kin (commonly parents or guardians). It is vital that you should never let this influence your decision to call an ambulance or attend an ED. If your friend needs medical assistance, make sure you ask for help as quickly as possible. The system is set up to keep people safe, not to punish them.

My friend is underage, will they get in trouble for drinking alcohol?

No. If someone needs an ambulance due to alcohol, it is a medical emergency. The paramedics and medical staff are there to help anyone who needs their care, regardless of the cause. No-one will ever get into trouble with the police for getting help in an alcohol-related emergency. Whilst parents may be contacted if the person is under the age of 18 years, police are not called.

Will they take my friend to hospital?

That depends on how unwell they are. If they are not too unwell, they may be left in the care of a responsible, sober adult. If they need to go to hospital, someone is generally allowed to accompany them. This is usually only one person, so it is important for a group of young people to choose the friend that knows them best. Talk to the paramedics if you are concerned, they are there to help you. They will never leave you or your friends in an unsafe situation.

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What is the most dangerous thing that can happen to a drunk person?

Drunk people are often unable to protect themselves and are vulnerable for many reasons. They should never be left on their own and if you believe that they are in danger and you are unable to deal with the situation by yourself, make sure you call for assistance as quickly as you can.

From a medical perspective, people who are in an altered conscious state due to alcohol can lose the ability to protect their airway by swallowing, coughing or vomiting. That means, if they are on their back when they vomit or try to swallow food, it can block their airway. This is why it is so important that anyone who is drunk and slipping in and out of consciousness is placed on their side, whilst you are waiting for an ambulance. Remember, being unconscious due to alcohol is a medical emergency!

Does the type of alcohol they were drinking make a difference to how you treat them?

It is not so much the type of alcohol but rather the amount that determines how drunk someone gets and therefore how paramedics will treat them. It is important to remember that some drinks have much higher alcohol concentrations than others, so you can drink far less but become drunk in a faster time. Drinking three Bacardi Breezers that contain just one standard drink is very different to drinking the same number of Smirnoff Double Blacks containing almost two standard drinks each. Although you are drinking the same amount of liquid, you're consuming a significantly higher amount of alcohol.

If you know what or how much a person has had to drink, always tell the paramedics the truth. It can help them know how sick someone may get and if further treatment may be required.

If they are just going to sleep it off at hospital, can't I look after them?

This is never a good idea. If someone has passed out due to alcohol or other drugs, it is a medical emergency. Sometimes they may need airway support or other treatment. They need to be assessed by a doctor or paramedic to ensure they are safe. Looking after people who are alcohol or drug affected is hard and stressful, don't try to do it alone.