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

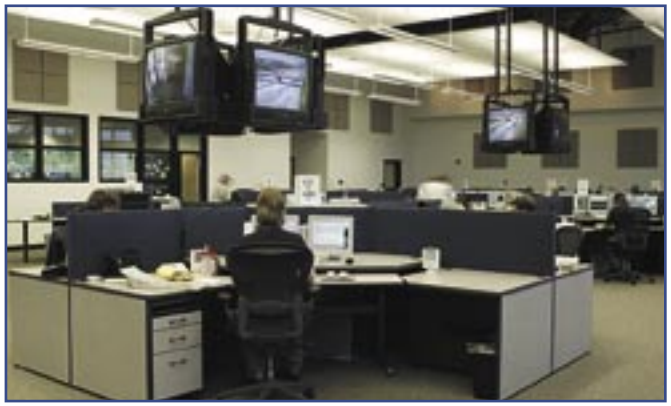
The **9-1-1** emergency number got its start in the 1970's as a way for people to get assistance more easily. Before the use of **9-1-1**, people had to use a 7-digit number to call for help. Time spent looking up emergency numbers, panicked misdialing, and failure to accurately verify the true location 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, cells 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.

When To Call 9-1-1 For Help

Research has shown that people have difficulty recognizing medical emergencies or underestimate their seriousness and fail to call for help. Remember, if you THINK you or someone you know is experiencing a medical emergency—call **9-1-1** immediately. Some examples would be if someone is:

- bitten by a snake or stung by a bee and is having a reaction
- experiencing an allergic reaction of any kind
- having a seizure or convulsion
- experiencing jerking movements they cannot control
- burned over an area larger than the palm of your hand
- electrically burned or shocked
- severely injured or is a victim of trauma or an attack
- bleeding or spurting blood and you can't get it to stop
- not breathing or having difficulty breathing
- gasping for air or turning blue or purple
- choking and the obstruction cannot be cleared
- unconscious, faints, is not alert or is making funny noises
- experiencing chest pains, constricting bands, or crushing discomfort around the chest area—even if the pain stops
- experiencing unusual numbness, tightness, pressure, or aching pain in their chest, neck, jaw, arm or upper back

The signs and symptoms of a medical emergency can be vague or unusual. For example, the classic symptom associated with heart attack is an uncomfortable, dull feeling of pressure or tightness in the chest. However, some people experiencing a heart attack may simply feel light headed, short of breath, sick to their stomach, or have a cold sweat. Less well-known symptoms such as these may be dismissed as a minor illness.



A certified Emergency Medical Dispatcher (EMD) at work. EMDs have specialized training to deal with crises over the phone.

Another reason that people fail to call **9-1-1** in an emergency is that those who are ill or injured are frequently in denial. The person may feel that the illness is not serious enough to call 9-1-1, or he or she may be worried about the long-term impact of the situation on such things as work, child care, or finances. Providing help in an emergency may involve acting in the face of uncertainty. You may have to force yourself to take action even though you are not sure that a real emergency exists or when the person is actively denying that they need help**. *Never be afraid to dial 9-1-1 just because you are unsure a real emergency exists.*** Dial **9-1-1** and let the dispatch center and emergency service professionals help you in times of confusion or doubt. That's what they are there for.

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 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:

1. Person's problem or the type of incident ("Tell me exactly what happened?").
2. Approximate age.
3. Is he or she conscious?
4. 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.

This brochure is provided to you courtesy of:

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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 think 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.

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National Academies of Emergency Dispatch

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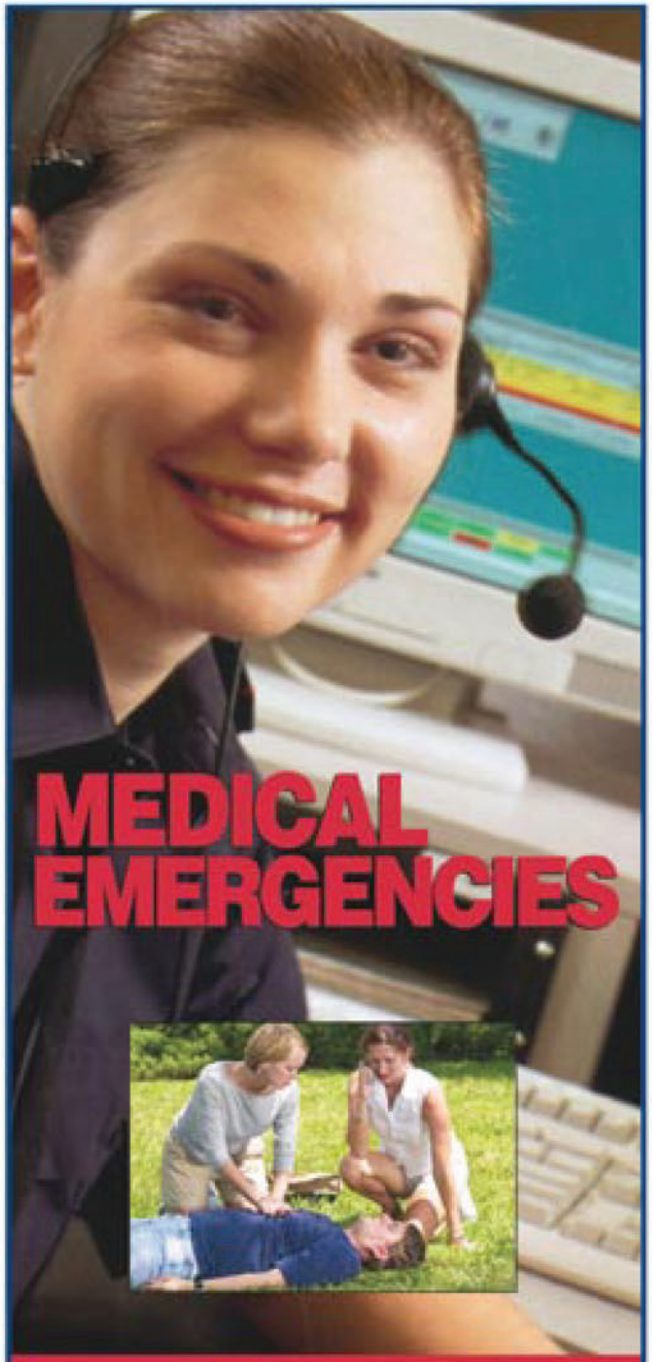

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

When to call and what to expect when you dial 9-1-1... What you should do before help arrives.