

## FACT SHEET

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### When to call 8-1-1 vs. 9-1-1

- Calling the right number makes a difference in helping B.C. health professionals assist you in getting the care you need as quickly as possible.

#### 8-1-1 and other resources (for situations that are not emergencies)

- 8-1-1 is B.C.'s 24/7 phone line that can help you find non-emergency health information and services. You can also speak to health care professionals who can answer your medical questions and direct you to the resources you need.
- Other alternatives to calling 9-1-1 if the situation is not an emergency:
  - Visit the HealthLinkBC.ca website and use their Interactive Symptom Checker.
  - Visit an urgent care centre or clinic if you can do it safely.
  - Call a pharmacist if you have a question or concern about a prescription.
  - Call the B.C. Poison Control Centre if you suspect someone has been poisoned with a medicine, chemical or substance. 604-682-5050 or 1-800-567-8911.
  - Mental health concerns: If someone is in immediate danger of hurting themselves, you should call 9-1-1 for assistance. For mental health support where there is no immediate risk to someone's safety, call the Crisis Centre's line at 310-6789 (no area code needed). If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, but it is not an immediate risk, they can call 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE) or call a local crisis centre.

#### 9-1-1 (for emergencies)

- 9-1-1 is for critical health and safety emergencies requiring ambulance paramedics or other first responders such as firefighters or police.
- You can dial 9-1-1 from any phone.
- Usually, 9-1-1 calls placed in British Columbia are initially answered by E-Comm, which is responsible for answering 99 per cent of 9-1-1 calls made in B.C.
- The E-Comm call-taker will ask the caller if they need police, the fire department or an ambulance. If E-Comm's call-taker has determined the caller needs to speak to BC Emergency Health Services, they will transfer the call to a BCEHS emergency medical call-taker who will then take over the process. In most circumstances, the transfer time for ambulance averages 45 seconds.

- You should call 9-1-1 for any of the following symptoms:
  - Chest pain or tightness
  - Choking or breathing difficulties
  - Loss of consciousness
  - Signs of a stroke
  - Severe burns
  - Convulsions that are not stopping
  - A drowning
  - A severe allergic reaction
  - A serious head injury
  - Major bleeding
  - Imminent childbirth
  
- If in doubt about whether you are experiencing a medical emergency, call 9-1-1.

#### Questions asked during a 9-1-1 call

- While the ambulance is travelling to the location, the call-taker will ask some simple questions that will help the paramedics understand the details of the situation. Some examples of the questions are:
  - The location of the emergency
  - The apartment number and access code if applicable
  - A telephone number in case the call is cut off
  - A description of what is happening
  - Is the patient conscious?
  - Is the patient breathing?
  - Does the patient have chest pain?
  - Is there any severe bleeding?
  - NOTE: If someone else at BCEHS is required to follow-up with the caller (e.g. a secondary triage professional or a paramedic specialist), they may ask for some or all of this information again to verify.
  
- Call-takers need to ask specific questions in a specific order to provide assistance as quickly and effectively as possible.
  
- Callers should remain on the line to provide additional information if requested to do so by the call-taker.

#### Dropped Calls

- If a caller chooses to hang up and call 9-1-1 again for unchanged conditions, they will be subject to further delays, losing their place in the queue. It is imperative people do not hang up and call back into the queue unless the condition of the patient changes. Calling back in will not get someone faster service and can impact our ability to provide timely help.
  
- Callers who hang up and call back actually create longer wait times and pull dispatch staff away from answering calls in the queue as BC Emergency Health Services has to

try to investigate why there is a dropped call (e.g. did the person collapse or did they just hang up and are now calling back?).

### Preparing for Ambulance Arrival

- Callers can assist paramedics before an ambulance arrives by:
  - Clearing a path to the patient (moving furniture and unlocking doors)
  - Having someone wait outside to meet the ambulance if possible
  - Ensuring the house number is clearly visible from the street
  - Turning on the outside lights at night or meeting paramedics at the lobby door of an apartment and having the elevator ready
  - Putting away dogs or other pets in a separate room if possible
  - Not moving the patient unless their life is threatened.
  
- BC Emergency Health Services works in partnership with all first responders to provide the swiftest care possible. BC Emergency Health Services notifies firefighter first responders of all potentially life-threatening calls so they can provide first aid such as CPR and monitor the patient until paramedics arrive. BC Emergency Health Services also notifies firefighter first responders of all motor vehicle incidents, fires, hazmat situations, drownings, and any other calls where their expertise and equipment may be needed.

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