

When and when not to call an ambulance



Avoid having a claim rejected for ambulance transport by understanding exactly when you should phone for an ambulance to take you to hospital. The most important factor when deciding if an ambulance is appropriate or not, is whether the situation is a real emergency.

Ambulances should always be available for real emergencies. An ambulance should never be used as a transport mechanism when you could have travelled in a private or public transport vehicle.

Ambulances are not means of transport to take you to or from the hospital for scheduled medical or surgical treatment. Only members who are physically disabled, regardless of age and require constant medical care will be allowed to be transported home with the motivation from their treating doctor.

The Scheme and Netcare 911 have embarked on a stringent programme to decrease the misuse of ambulances and to try to ensure that ambulance transports are reserved for patients who fit the definition for emergencies:

What is an emergency?



The definition is as follows: *"An emergency medical condition means the sudden and, at the time, unexpected onset of a health condition that requires immediate medical treatment and/or an operation. If the treatment is not available, the emergency could result in weakened bodily functions, serious and lasting damage to organs, limbs, or other body parts, or even death."*

All ambulance cases will be audited to assess whether the patient was admitted into hospital and/or whether there was a need for specialised emergency care. If the patient was not admitted and did not require specialised care, the ambulance claim may be rejected, and the member billed privately for the transportation.



When should you call an ambulance, and when not?

To help members understand when calling an ambulance is advisable, and when it will probably just end up costing them money, use the following handy comparison of emergencies versus non-emergencies. If you are uncertain whether a situation warrants calling an ambulance, you can also call Netcare 911's helpline on **082 911** for advice.

 EMERGENCY CALL AN AMBULANCE	 NOT AN EMERGENCY REFER TO YOUR PHARMACIST/GP
<p>When a person has suffered an acute injury or illness requiring immediate medical attention and/or medical transportation</p> <p>A doctor/ registered nurse/ paramedic has requested the urgent transport of a patient</p> <p>Acute life-threatening scenario, such as heart attacks</p>	<p>Only indication for use is availability of transport.</p> <p>Patient's life or usual activities would not be immediately threatened by referral to an alternative care facility for treatment later.</p> <p>Non-urgent health need outside of usual office hours</p>
<p>Persistent shortness of breath/ wheezing/ ongoing chest pain that worsens on breathing.</p> <p>Wheezing and difficulty of breathing associated with asthma (with no response to usual medications)</p>	<p>Coughs, colds, flu, bronchitis, earache, sore throat - with or without fever, general weakness</p>
<p>Acute or persistent, severe chest pain, especially if it radiates to the arm or jaw and is accompanied by sweating, vomiting or shortness of breath.</p>	<p>Ongoing, dull, nagging chest discomfort</p>
<p>Sudden, severe onset of abdominal pain (the kind that makes it impossible to walk and wakes one up in agony)</p>	<p>Abdominal pain caused by menstruation, constipation and/ or other minor abdominal complaints.</p>
<p>Difficulty speaking, confusion/ altered mental state, weakness/ paralysis, sudden loss of balance, especially with a history of high blood pressure, sudden loss of vision, seizures, unconsciousness</p>	<p>Fainting, dizziness, and headaches in an otherwise healthy person. Accidental tripping or falling without severe injury.</p>
<p>Fever: >40°C, does NOT respond to Paracetamol, associated with all-over body rash.</p> <p>Children under 2 months with fever >38.5°C</p>	<p>Fever: <38.5°C, responds to use of Paracetamol, no rash</p>
<p>Ongoing, persistent diarrhoea & vomiting with dehydration (usually > 8 episodes/ day)</p>	<p>Diarrhoea and/ or vomiting, patient able to walk around</p>
<p>Trauma: bleeding that won't stop, large open wounds, broken bones/ dislocated joints, head injuries with loss of consciousness, eye injuries</p>	<p>Trauma: Common sprains & strains, superficial cuts, bleeding stopped with pressure</p>
<p>Burns: Large surface area, where the burn encircles the limb, electrical burns</p>	<p>Burns: Minor burns and scalding, small surface area</p>
<p>Major allergic reaction: Breathing difficulties, swelling of lips, tongue or throat, dizziness or fainting, rash and itching over entire body</p>	<p>Minor allergic reactions: Watery eyes, runny nose, minor rash and itching</p>
<p>Poisoning – accidental or intentional</p>	
<p>Back pain after trauma (such as falling), or after back surgery <3 months previously</p>	<p>Back pain after heavy lifting, generalised back spasm</p>
<p>Pregnancy: Before 37 weeks are completed, emergency determined – Rupture of membranes (waters broken), excessive bleeding, contractions ≤ 5 minutes apart, complication in current or previous pregnancies, pregnancy induced hypertension diagnosed, crowning of the head</p>	<p>Pregnancy: Normal pregnancy/ labour reached >37 weeks</p>
<p>Mental Health: suicidal thoughts expressed, sudden aggression/ psychosis, previous history of psychiatric admission, possible relapse requiring emergency admission</p>	<p>Mental Health: Depression/ emotional trauma</p>