



HEALTH ALERT

Gregory Cherpes, MD
ODP Medical Director



April 19, 2023

CALL 911 IN A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

In an Emergency, Act Without Delay!

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is issuing this revised Health Alert to emphasize the need to avoid delay in seeking emergency medical care. There are two key issues in reducing this risk for delay: 1. **Recognizing a medical emergency:** correctly interpreting and acting on these signs could potentially save a life. 2. **Seeking immediate attention for the emergency:** with medical emergencies, time is of the essence. Provider policies should not instruct staff to contact a supervisor prior to calling 911 in an emergency. Failure to call 911, which can result in treatment delays, may contribute to serious injury or death of an individual that otherwise may have been prevented if 911 was called. This Health Alert is intended to help providers and staff respond to medical emergencies by contacting 911 without delay.

What is a Medical Emergency?

Any event that threatens someone's life or limb in such a way that immediate medical care is needed to prevent death or serious impairment of health, such as severe pain, serious injury, serious illness, or a medical condition that is quickly getting worse.

The American College of Emergency Physicians advises that everyone should learn to recognize the warning signs of a medical emergency. Unsure whether it is a medical emergency? Ask these questions:

- Is there a threat to life or limb?

- Could the condition worsen quickly on the way to the hospital?
- If you move the victim, will it cause further injury?
- Does the person need skills or equipment that paramedics or EMT's carry right away?

If you answer YES or "I Don't Know"



Call 911 right away

Signs and Symptoms of Life-Threatening Medical Emergencies To Keep in Mind		
Heart Attack	Stroke	Heat Stroke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chest tightness or discomfort ▪ Pain in one or both arms, back, neck, or stomach ▪ Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort, cold sweat, nausea, light headedness ▪ Women may also experience: Pain in jaw or upper belly, dizziness, unusual fatigue and heartburn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>F</u>ace drooping. Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? ▪ <u>A</u>rm weakness. Is an arm weak or numb? ▪ <u>S</u>peech difficulty. Is speech slurred? ▪ <u>T</u>ime to call 9-1-1. If anyone has any of these symptoms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Body temperature over 103° F ▪ Hot, red, dry, or moist skin ▪ Rapid and strong pulse ▪ Headache, dizziness, nausea, or confusion ▪ Unconsciousness

Difficulty Breathing	Choking	Severe Allergic Reaction (Anaphylaxis)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not able to say a few words without stopping to breath ▪ Severe wheezing, or shortness of breath ▪ Skin color becoming pale or blue (cyanosis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual suddenly becomes anxious or agitated ▪ Reddened face ▪ Difficulty or noisy breathing ▪ Severe coughing or gagging ▪ Hands to throat ▪ Not able to talk or breath ▪ Skin turns gray or blue ▪ Loss of consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficulty breathing ▪ Swelling around mouth and neck ▪ Skin reactions including hives, swelling, and redness
Shock	Low Blood Sugar from Diabetes	Severe Bleeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling weak, faint, or dizzy ▪ Feeling nauseated or thirsty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weakness or feeling shaky ▪ Sleepiness ▪ Sweating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bleeding from any wound that will not stop ▪ Amputation of limb or body part

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having pale or grayish skin color ▪ Being restless, agitated or confused ▪ Being cold or clammy to the touch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Irritability or confusion ▪ Hungry or thirsty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bleeding from mouth, nose, eyes, ears, vagina, or rectum that will not stop ▪ Coughing or vomiting blood
---	--	---

Other Warning Signs of a Medical Emergency

The following list of warning signs of a medical emergency was adapted from the US National Library webpage on Recognizing Medical Emergencies. The list is not a substitute for medical advice and does not represent every kind of medical emergency. Print this list and place it where it can be readily accessible in a hurry.

When in Doubt, Call 911

- Bleeding that will not stop
- Breathing problems
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Shortness of breath
- Change in mental status
 - Confusion
 - Difficulty arousing
 - Unusual behavior
- Chest pain

- Choking
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Falls involving injury to the head particularly when the person is on anticoagulation medication (e.g., Warfarin)
- Feelings of wanting to commit suicide or murder
- Injuries requiring more than first aid, including:
 - Head or spine injury
 - Injury due to a motor vehicle accident
 - Burns or smoke inhalation
 - Near drowning
 - Deep or large wound
 - Other injuries
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Sudden dizziness, weakness, or change in vision
- Swallowing a poisonous substance or excess medication
- Severe abdominal pain or pressure

What to Do When Calling 911

- Remain calm
- **Call 9-1-1 PRIOR to calling supervisor or other agency staff members**
- Stay on the line to answer dispatcher's questions
 - Provide your name, phone number and location
 - Describe what happened
- Keep the connection open until the dispatcher tells you to hang up

What You Can Do Now

- Learn the signs and symptoms of a medical emergency and the individual's usual state of health
- Discuss when to call 911, to apply CPR, and start first aid
- As always, support for an individual should be person-centered. Planning should include team discussions with input from treating health care practitioners for the best course of action for individuals with medical conditions that may predispose them to injury or illness. Discuss individual situations or symptoms that require a call to 911
- Update policies as needed to ensure timely response is not delayed. **Agency policy must not require staff to contact supervisors or other people prior to calling 911 in a medical emergency**
- Practice emergency drills across all shifts
- You can learn more about recognizing and acting on emergency warning signs through classes offered through the local hospital, American Red Cross, American Heart Association, or the Health Care Quality Units (HCQU's) of Pennsylvania

References and resources

The following resources were used for this Alert and can provide additional information about when to call 911:

- American Heart Association, Heart Saver First Aid, CPR, AED course, April 2016
- <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001927.htm>
- <http://www.redcross.org/> - This site also offers smart phone apps.
- <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html>, “Warning Signs and Symptoms of Heat – Related Illness”
- <http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/content.aspx?id=2079>
- <http://www.symptomfind.com/health/when-to-call-911-emergency/#kkGiKRsoVozavarS.99>
- [Warfarin: MedlinePlus Drug Information](#)