



Recognizing medical emergencies

According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, the following are warning signs of a medical emergency:

- **Bleeding** that will not stop
- Breathing problems (**difficulty breathing**, **shortness of breath**)
- **Change in mental status** (such as unusual behavior, **confusion**, difficulty arousing)
- **Chest pain**
- Choking
- Coughing up or **vomiting blood**
- **Fainting** or **loss of consciousness**
- Feeling of committing suicide or murder
- Head or spine injury
- Severe or persistent **vomiting**
- Sudden injury due to a motor vehicle accident, burns or smoke inhalation, near drowning, deep or large wound, etc.
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Sudden **dizziness**, **weakness**, or change in vision
- Swallowing a poisonous substance
- Upper **abdominal pain** or pressure

BE PREPARED

- Determine the location and quickest route to the nearest emergency department before an emergency happens.
- Keep emergency phone numbers posted by the phone. Everyone in your household, including children, should know when and how to call these numbers. **These numbers include:** fire department, police department, poison control center, ambulance center, your doctors' phone numbers, and contact numbers of neighbors or nearby friends or relatives, and work phone numbers.
- Know at which hospital(s) your doctor practices and, if practical, go there in an emergency.
- Wear a medical identification tag if you have a chronic condition or look for one on a person who has any of the symptoms mentioned.
- Get a personal emergency response system if you are elderly, especially if you live alone.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP

- Remain calm, and call your local emergency number (such as 911).
- Start **CPR** (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) or rescue breathing, if necessary and if you know the proper technique.
- Place a semiconscious or **unconscious** person in the recovery position until the ambulance arrives. **DO NOT** move the person, however, if there has been or may have been a neck injury.

Upon arriving at an emergency room, the person will be immediately evaluated. Life- or limb-threatening conditions will be treated first. People with conditions that are not life- or limb-threatening may have to wait.

CALL YOUR LOCAL EMERGENCY NUMBER (SUCH AS 911) IF:

- The person's condition is life-threatening (for example, the person is having a **heart attack** or **severe allergic reaction**)
- The person's condition could become life-threatening on the way to the hospital
- Moving the person could cause further injury (for example, in case of a neck injury or motor vehicle accident)
- The person needs the skills or equipment of paramedics
- Traffic conditions or distance might cause a delay in getting the person to the hospital

References

Marx JA, Hockberger RS, Walls RM, et al, eds. *Rosen's Emergency Medicine: Concepts and Clinical Practice*. 8th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier Saunders; 2014:chap 190.

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