

## Preparing Kids to Go to the ER

### Brighton Volunteer Ambulance

If your child is ill and you call 9-1-1 for an ambulance—or if you take your child to the Emergency Room yourself—there is some critical information you should have ready. Emergencies can leave even the most articulate person speechless, so keeping written records at home means you'll have the information available in an emergency situation.

#### **Plan ahead.**

The best way to prepare for emergencies is to plan ahead.

Know your child's medical history and prepare a written medical data sheet for each child. This will also provide information for others who may be caring for your child at home, such as a babysitter or grandparent. Include:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Height and weight
- Medications your child is taking
- Allergies
- History of previous hospitalizations
- Past surgeries
- Recent illnesses or injuries, and chronic conditions
- Relevant family history
- Immunization history
- Name and number of your child's primary care provider
- Phone number and name of your pharmacy
- Primary caregiver (parent) contact information (home, work, cellphone)
- Emergency contact information (home, work, cellphone)
- Neighbor's contact information (home, work, cellphone) if applicable

You won't always be at home when there's an emergency, so post your home address and medical data sheets on the refrigerator where babysitters, visitors or grandparents will have it accessible. (Don't forget to show caregivers, emergency contacts, and other family members where this information is kept.) Carry a copy of the data sheets in your wallet or on your phone, in case you need to relay this information to medical staff in an emergency.

Teach young children how to call 9-1-1 and be sure that they can recite their full name, address and phone number. Provide clear instructions on the importance of calling only in an emergency. Also, teach children what kinds of things are an "emergency," so that they have a reference for when to call 9-1-1. Be clear in explaining that 9-1-1 is not something to play with, and should only be used in an emergency.

## **Is it a true emergency?**

If you think that an injury or illness is an imminent threat to health or life, this is a true emergency. Call an ambulance right away if you are unable to safely transport or move your child to the Emergency Department, or if you notice your child has one or more of these signs or symptoms:

- Difficulty with breathing, such as rapid or labored breathing
- Rapid heartbeat that doesn't slow down
- Changes in mental status, such as inability to wake up, suddenly becoming unusually sleepy, being disoriented or confused, not making sense
- Severe bleeding, or bleeding from a cut or wound that won't stop
- Fever that will not resolve with rapid heartbeat, difficulty breathing, changes in mental status, spreading rash, or unusual pains
- Allergic reaction
- Head trauma
- Suspicion of ingesting a poisonous substance or medication

EMTs and Paramedics can correct life-threatening emergencies and begin the care and treatment your child will continue to receive in the emergency department.

If you are unsure of what to do, call 9-1-1 before starting first aid. The 9-1-1 operator will give you instructions while you are waiting for the ambulance. If possible, have someone assist you in calling 9-1-1 while you remain with your child. Remember, it is safer for your child to be transported to the emergency department by ambulance.

Understand that going to the emergency department by ambulance does not guarantee your child will be seen faster. Care in the emergency department is provided fastest to those with the most critical needs.

For non-emergency situations, call your child's pediatrician for guidance. Your pediatrician may advise you to call 9-1-1 for an ambulance or may provide alternate methods of care that are appropriate for your child's needs.

## **After you've called 9-1-1**

- Stay calm, listen to the 9-1-1 operator's instructions, and stay on the phone if asked to do so.
- Be sure your house numbers are illuminated at night so emergency workers can find your address.
- Leave a porch light on (even during the day) or have someone outside to flag down the emergency vehicles.
- Have all pets secured in another part of the house. The friendliest dog may have a protective, violent reaction when the emergency responders come in the house and begin to interact with your child.

## **When the ambulance arrives**

Be prepared to provide the EMTs and Paramedics with the medical data sheet. You may be asked additional questions, such as when your child last had anything to eat or drink. Only bring medications your child is taking with you to the hospital if the medications are not included on the medical data sheet, or if the EMT or Paramedic asks you to bring the medications with you.

If your child has ingested a household product, medication, or suspicious food, bring the container with you to the ER to help the doctors understand how to treat your child.

### **Can a parent ride in the ambulance?**

Ambulances are tight quarters, but in most cases a parent may be able to ride along. Whenever possible, a parent will be permitted to ride with their child, for the comfort of both parent and child, and so that the parent can provide a source of information and consent for treatment.

Remember that EMTs and Paramedics are trained healthcare professionals who will bring much of the skill and equipment of an emergency department to your door. Paramedics and EMTs must have safe access to their equipment, and to your child, to provide effective treatment. Please be a responsible and active advocate for your child's care, but remember that obstructing the work of an EMT or Paramedic can prevent them from helping your child during their emergency. Be aware that if having a parent or caregiver with your child in the ambulance is hindering your child's care or is escalating your child's emotions, the EMS crew may have the parent or caregiver ride in the front of the ambulance apart from your child.

A neighbor or family member may be a responsible choice to drive an emotional parent to meet the ambulance at the ER. Arrive to see your child safe – don't drive if you are not comfortable or prepared to do so.

### **What to expect at the ER**

Depending on how busy the emergency department is and how severe your child's emergency is, you may have to wait to be seen. If you have time before leaving for the ER, gather something to read, pen and paper to write down questions for the medical team, and items to help comfort and distract your child while waiting. Washable toys, books, computer tablets, DVD players (with earphones), crayons and coloring books, or stuffed animals will help ease your child in the unfamiliar surroundings.

If you think your child might have to be admitted to the hospital, and you have time, bring a change of clothes and toothbrushes for you and your child.

If you are not comfortable with speaking English, the hospital will have translation services available. However, you may want to bring a friend or relative with you to help translate and provide support.

### **Helping your child understand EMS**

Talking with your child in advance about how Paramedics and EMTs help people when they are sick or injured is important. Children should understand that ambulances take people to the hospital for medical care, and that Paramedics and EMTs are part of that caring process. Talking about the EMS staff as helping, caring and safe people is important, so your children will not be afraid of these "strangers" when they arrive. (Attending the BVA Open House held every spring can get your child familiar with the inside of an ambulance and meet Paramedics and EMTs; individual visits or tours can also be arranged.)

Discuss what to do in an emergency: how to call 9-1-1, and what types of situations require an emergency call. Explain that the operator will help them with what to do next. Teach children how to say their FULL name, phone number, and street address.

Explain the difference between emergencies and non-emergencies—a skinned knee is non-emergency, but a more serious injury or situation may be an emergency that warrants a 9-1-1 call.

### **Children with special health care needs**

If your child has special health care needs, they may need more frequent or specialized emergency medical care. The American College of Emergency Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics have developed an Emergency Information Form (EIF), which can be downloaded from their [website](#). This document is an important tool to provide critical information about your child’s medical condition and history and will help the EMS and ER teams best care for your child.

#### **In Case of Emergency**

- Stay calm
- Start rescue breathing or CPR if your child is not breathing.
- Call 9-1-1 for help. Most cell phones can reach 9-1-1, but you should try to tell the operator where you are.
- Follow the instructions of the 9-1-1 operator. Advocate for your child’s care, and have information available on your child’s medical history or special needs.
- Remain calm, and reassure your child, and stay at their side until help arrives. They will respond to your emotions in an emergency, as children do not have experience with coping or reacting to emergencies.
- Unless in the presence of immediate danger (e.g., a fire), do not move your injured child.
- Work with Paramedics, EMTs and hospital staff to help your child. Do not obstruct their ability to help your child, as this can prevent your child from receiving necessary treatment. Remember that these medical professionals are doing everything they are able to in the best interest of your child.

This information comes from Brighton Volunteer Ambulance, 1551 Winton Road South, Rochester, N.Y. 14618, (585) 271-2718, [www.brightonambulance.org](http://www.brightonambulance.org) or follow us on Facebook.

Brighton Volunteer Ambulance (BVA), a nonprofit independent volunteer ambulance service, provides advanced and basic life support emergency medical services to Brighton residents. BVA also provides community education in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), the use of automatic external defibrillators (AED) and other EMS related services. To learn more, visit [www.brightonambulance.org](http://www.brightonambulance.org)