

## For major health issues, choose an ambulance

My own car or an ambulance?

Sure, for minor cuts and bruises that require a trip to urgent care, the former may be appropriate.

But for things like heart attack symptoms, stroke symptoms or serious wounds, [Kurt Bloomstrand, MD](#), says the choice is clear: call the ambulance.

Dr. Bloomstrand is an Emergency Department physician at OSF HealthCare in [Urbana, Illinois](#) and medical director for [East Central Illinois EMS](#) (emergency medical services). He and his colleagues have seen an alarming trend lately of people with suspected heart attack coming to the Emergency Department on their own.

“Ambulances and pre-hospital providers are equipped and trained to deal with these emergencies. We can deal with these emergencies at your home or wherever you called 9-1-1 at,” Dr. Bloomstrand says. “We’re bringing the equipment from the ED to you so we can get that treatment started even sooner and bring you life-saving treatment and medication immediately.”

For example, pre-hospital providers on site or in the back of the ambulance can perform an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG for short), which takes a snapshot of how your heart is working. If problems are found, these providers can call ahead to the hospital and have the person [bypass the ED](#) and go directly to the cardiac catheterization laboratory. That’s a time-saving and life-saving step.

On the alternative: “If you drive yourself, there’s no way to monitor you. There’s no way to treat you if something happens,” Dr. Bloomstrand says.

Other possible pitfalls: you may pass out at the wheel from your initial medical event, causing a crash that endangers you, other drivers and pedestrians. If someone is driving you, they will likely be anxious and not drive carefully. That, too, could mean a wreck.

Private vehicles are legally not allowed to speed and go through stoplights and stop signs. An ambulance can safely, saving time.

And it may seem trivial, but if you are driving to the hospital with a serious wound, you will likely make a bloody mess all over your vehicle.

Dr. Bloomstrand has also heard plenty of misconceptions about taking an ambulance.

People who live in a rural area may think, “By the time the ambulance gets to me, I may be worse off, and I could have already been at the hospital if I took myself.”

Dr. Bloomstrand counters that although it might take time for the ambulance to arrive, this time is often faster than the time it would take to get treatment by driving to the Emergency Department.

Others may believe they can’t afford an ambulance. Dr. Bloomstrand says most major health insurance providers cover the care.

Some may think, “I’m not sick enough for an ambulance.”

“It’s your emergency. We’re there 24/7 to help and assist in your emergency,” Dr. Bloomstrand says. “If you feel like you’re having an emergency, you need to call 9-1-1. We can come and evaluate you. Please don’t feel like you’re burdening the ambulance system.”

Others may just fear an ambulance in general. They're nervous about having a needle in their arm while in a fast-moving vehicle. Dr. Bloomstrand counters by reminding you that paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are highly skilled and trained. They have been around the block – literally.

“We deal with this day in and day out. We're trained and equipped to handle these emergencies,” Dr. Bloomstrand says.