

## What to expect when you call an ambulance

*It's no doubt stressful. But if you know the dos and don'ts, it can be a less bumpy ride*

When it comes to ambulances and the services they provide, [Lisa Reid](#), APRN, knows a thing or two because she's seen a thing or two.

The family medicine provider at OSF HealthCare was an ambulance first responder for more than 15 years before moving to the nursing side of things. As such, she's heard a lot of "Should I do this or that?" when calling an ambulance. Now, it's time to clear up the misconceptions.

- Who's coming to get me? Should I be concerned about their qualifications?

Reid says different first responders can do different things, but you can be assured you'll get the care you need.

"Paramedics have more training in life-saving skills. They can do things like intubation [putting a tube down your throat to help breathing] and give intravenous [IV] medications. Emergency medical technicians [EMTs] provide more basic care. They help stabilize the person and get them ready for transport. They also usually drive."

- Where should I wait?

Reid says if you're hurt or ill, it doesn't make sense to drag yourself to the curb to wait for the flashing lights. Changing locations could also waste precious time as the first responders look for you. So, stay where you are. If you're inside, unlock the door if you can. If you can't, Reid says first responders can get to you. For example, firefighters or police officers often go on medical calls and can break down doors or otherwise keep the scene safe.

- Do I need to share my health information and directives to get care?

Again, Reid says, do it if you can. But it won't delay the on-scene care if you can't.

"Some people put the information on their cell phone. Some people hang the documents on their refrigerator," Reid says.

You can also fill out your health record with your health system in advance of an emergency – things such as allergies and advanced directives – so providers know what to do when you arrive.

- Can I expect care in my home? Will I go in the ambulance right away? Or both?

Each case is different, but if the situation calls for it, ambulance workers can and will treat you on-scene.

"If it's a critical situation, they will often stabilize you and go [with you in the ambulance]. If it's something where they can stay and do IVs and monitor you, they will," Reid says.

The responders might even determine you don't need a trip to the hospital.

- Vehicle rides are bumpy. How can they treat me safely in an ambulance?

Reid admits the ride can be scary. You're surrounded by equipment and noise. But EMTs and paramedics are trained to do things like give IV fluids while rolling down the road.

Don't expect to undergo surgery in the ambulance, Reid says. But she says it's also common for responders to give medication, intubate and perform CPR in the vehicle.

"It's a mini emergency department on wheels," she says.

- I arrived in an ambulance, so I must get priority when I get to the emergency department.

“Not always true,” Reid says.

“The ED is going to prioritize their emergencies based on the need for care. So to call an ambulance solely because you think you’ll be first in line – that won’t necessarily be true,” she adds.

**Learn more**

Read more about how emergency medical services serve you on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).