



**St John**  
Here for Life

# Calling an ambulance

## An update for primary healthcare staff

### Introduction

This is a further update for primary health professionals (for example registered nurses and doctors) involved in requesting an ambulance response in areas covered by St John. As you may recall from our last update, it is preferred that health professionals use the dedicated healthcare professionals' number (**0800 262 665**) when requesting an ambulance response. Using the 0800 number enables a Paramedic to answer the call during periods of peak demand, which ensures the most appropriate priority of ambulance response.

Since implementing the health professionals line over 12 months ago, we have seen a reduction in the number of lights and sirens responses to medical facilities in cases where the patient does not have a life-threatening condition. We have also been able to upgrade the priority of response when appropriate, ensure the most appropriate clinical-level of ambulance crew is dispatched based on patient need and in life-threatening cases, provide clinical advice to health professionals when required/requested.

### A reminder of which number to use when requesting an ambulance

There are still healthcare personnel at several health facilities dialing 111 instead of phoning the **0800 262 665** number when requesting an ambulance. Whenever possible, we ask that the 0800 number is used.

### We need to work together for the safety of our patients

For the safety of all our patients, it is vital that the priority of ambulance response is proportional to the patient's clinical condition. When healthcare personnel dial 111 and state that the patient's problem is immediately life-threatening when it is not, an ambulance will be sent to the health facility under lights and sirens, which may mean a patient with a time-critical condition in the community has to wait longer for an ambulance and this may impair their outcome. Using the **0800 262 665** number enables the health professional requesting the ambulance to speak to a Paramedic (during periods of peak demand) which helps ensure an appropriate priority of response.

When the call is answered by a Paramedic during times of peak demand, they will ask some additional clinical questions to determine the patient's acuity and the most appropriate priority of response. These additional questions will only take 1–2 minutes and will not delay the ambulance response.

It is for this reason that whenever possible, a clinically trained person phones for the ambulance. If another person such as a receptionist is asked to call, please ensure they have all the available information. The attached primary care ambulance request template provides a useful guide and can be photocopied as required.

### What if the Paramedic is already on a call?

We understand that call volumes may be greater than what we can manage at any one time. Please be assured that all calls to the **0800 262 665** line are answered as soon as possible. If the caller has pushed '1' (because the patient's condition is immediately life-threatening) and the Paramedic is unavailable (for example, is on another call), then the call will be immediately diverted to a 111 Call Handler. You may then receive a call back once the Paramedic is available if additional information is required.

### For more information

Attached is a one-page document entitled *Requesting an ambulance* that describes typical priorities of ambulance response to different clinical conditions. Please share this with your staff and display it in an appropriate area, noting that it is not intended for public view.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please send them to St John Medical Director Dr Tony Smith at [clinical.excellence@stjohn.org.nz](mailto:clinical.excellence@stjohn.org.nz)