



**St John**

Here for Life

# Calling an ambulance

## An update for primary healthcare staff

### Introduction

This update is for primary healthcare staff calling an ambulance in areas covered by St John.

- It is vital that the priority of ambulance response is proportional to the severity of the patient's clinical condition.
- Unfortunately, most requests for an emergency ambulance response are for clinical conditions that are not immediately life threatening.

### Calling for an ambulance

Approximately 20% of all calls for an ambulance come from a facility with clinically trained staff, such as a medical centre or aged care facility. If the patient has already been assessed by a doctor or a nurse, the caller is asked questions that are quite different (and smaller in number) than when the caller is a member of the public.

#### One of the first questions asked is:

- "Is the problem immediately life threatening?"

If the answer is "yes" an ambulance is dispatched with lights and sirens. We recently audited 100 such calls and found 70% of those calls were for patients with conditions that were not immediately life threatening.

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

For the safety of all of our patients it is vital that the priority of ambulance response is proportional to the severity of their clinical condition. If a patient in a medical centre or aged care facility with a clinical condition that is not immediately life threatening gets a high priority response, then our response to a patient in the community with a greater need may be delayed and this may impair their outcome.

It is therefore important that whenever possible, a clinically trained person such as a nurse or a doctor calls for the ambulance. If another person such as a receptionist is asked to call, please ensure they have all the available information. During times of significant demand, one of our clinical personnel may call back to speak with a nurse or doctor and ask clarifying questions. This will only take 1–2 minutes and will enable us to arrange the most appropriate response.

### The correct number to call when requesting an ambulance

We now prefer that healthcare personnel phone **0800 262 665** when requesting an ambulance. This is because we have recently enhanced our system to ensure that whenever possible, calls coming in on this number are answered by a clinician in order to ensure the most appropriate response for the patient.

### 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.

### Questions

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)