
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Health Services

PUBLIC URGED TO USE AMBULANCE SERVICE WISELY

VANCOUVER – BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) is urging the public to use the ambulance service wisely this weekend as staffing shortages worsen following statements made by union executives yesterday, directing paramedics not to fill shifts as required by the Essential Services Order.

The shortages are impacting the availability of ambulances on the ground and dispatch capacity. During the night, there was at least a two-hour period when ambulance complement on the lower mainland was down by 30 per cent - including no ambulance crews in Whistler, Hope or Agassiz. Priority will be given to emergency calls, with delays expected for non-emergency calls and inter-facility patient transfer calls.

BCAS is working with its managers and physician advisors to mitigate the staffing shortages, including triaging lower acuity calls and patient transfers, and other measures to ensure patients have the support they need.

To ensure that patients who are seriously ill or have critical injuries receive an ambulance as soon as possible, BCAS is asking people with non-acute conditions to consider alternatives to calling an ambulance such as:

- Call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse, dietician or pharmacist;
- Go to a local walk-in health care clinic;
- Visit your general practitioner; or
- Make your own way to the hospital emergency department - arriving in an ambulance does not mean patients will be seen more quickly.

People who are unsure if they need ambulance service are asked to call 8-1-1 first and receive a medical assessment over the phone from a registered nurse. Only approximately 30 per cent of ambulance calls in B.C. require an emergency 'lights and siren' response.

BCAS is appealing to paramedics to comply with the Essential Services Order and not let the labour dispute negatively impact patient care.

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