



PRESS RELEASE

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BC Paramedics see surge in COVID-19 calls; some fear to go to hospital

Vancouver, British Columbia – BC paramedics estimate that 75 percent of calls to 911 ambulance dispatch are related to suspicions of COVID-19 or other influenza-type symptoms, and the first-responders are asking that British Columbians call if they are experiencing an emergency that may require assessment and hospitalization.

“We understand the community may be scared, but we’ve observed some people are calling 911 seeking a COVID-19 evaluation from ambulance dispatchers and paramedics when emergency care or hospitalization are not required,” said Troy Clifford, president of Ambulance Paramedics of BC and Emergency Dispatchers of BC. “This can tie-up dispatchers and ambulance crews during an unprecedented time in history and potentially delay more serious calls.”

As governments and health officials have advised, if people believe they have COVID-19, they should self-isolate and call 811, their doctor, or the public health line. If someone is in distress, they should call 911 ambulance dispatch for immediate attention and care.

Refusal to go to hospital

Ambulance paramedics have also observed that people with a genuine emergency are getting assessed but then refusing to be transported to hospital out of fear of COVID-19.

“Obviously, if someone requires hospitalization, ambulance paramedics are highly trained and ensure that people get the right care and transport, as required,” said Clifford. “Like all frontline workers, our employer has provided guidelines and protocols to ensure safety, reduce exposure, and prevent transmission of COVID-19, including doing the initial assessment in the doorway while standing a minimum of 6 feet away, along with using the proper protective equipment.”

Decrease in other types of calls

Ambulance dispatchers have observed a decrease in other types of calls, possibly because people are staying home. “With a large chunk of our population in self-isolation at home, ambulance dispatchers say they are receiving fewer calls about car accidents, falls, assaults, and workplace accidents,” said Clifford.

Another possibility is that people may not be calling 911 because of concerns they don’t want to be exposed to COVID-19 at the hospital.

“Ambulance paramedics urge British Columbians not to hesitate to call 911 in a true emergency, as first-responders and healthcare workers have put strict measures in place to reduce exposure to the virus,” said Clifford.

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Media Interviews: Troy Clifford is available for phone, on-camera, and Skype interviews. Please contact Renu Bakshi to make arrangements: 604 787 1873 or renu@renubakshi.com or Troy Clifford directly at 250 319 4713 or Troy.Clifford@apbc.ca

About

The British Columbia Emergency Health Service (BCEHS) is the province’s primary emergency medical services provider. BCEHS employs over 4,400 paramedics and dispatchers, represented by Ambulance Paramedics of BC and Emergency Dispatchers of BC.

From our three dispatch centers located in Victoria, Vancouver and Kamloops, we field more than 550,000 calls each year, making us one of the largest and busiest emergency medical services agencies in the world. www.apbc.ca

