

# Tips for Parents of Children with Special Health Care Needs: How to Preplan with Local EMS for an Emergency

Some children with special health care needs are more likely to need emergency medical services (EMS), and even common childhood illness and injury can be complicated when a child has a behavioral, physical or cognitive condition requiring special consideration or treatment. Educating local emergency care providers about a child's health care needs before an emergency can help improve care for that child.

## How To Establish a Connection with Local EMS

For children with special health care needs, it is helpful to establish a connection with local EMS providers. Local EMS providers may be based in a public safety facility, fire station or hospital, depending on type of service. Call the non-emergency EMS phone number and ask to speak to a supervisor regarding a child with special health care needs. If desired, request to set up a time to visit the station, or request that a representative visit the child's home.

## Provide EMS Specifics About the Child

Provide EMS with a home address and an Emergency Information Form for the child (find one **HERE**). If requested, many dispatchers can attach a short note to a home address in the computer dispatch system regarding the child's condition. If there is a 911 call from that address, the note will pop up and dispatchers can inform the responding ambulance crew that the child has special health care concerns.

By necessity, parents often become experts on their child's condition. At a meeting with EMS providers, explain the child's special health care needs. Provide EMS providers with information about any equipment (ventilator, oxygen, medication pump, communication device, etc.) commonly used by the child. Identify any common problems that might come up—these may include dislodged tracheostomy tubes or gastrostomy tubes, the need for suction or issues with low oxygen levels, for example. Let EMS providers know what the child's typical presentation is—how does s/he communicate, is s/he mobile, his or her typical level of consciousness, etc. If the child has behavioral or other issues that might affect presentation or reaction to medical presence, like autism or mental health concerns, be sure to let EMS providers know that as well.

## If There is an Emergency

Tell dispatchers the child has special health care needs. Have a copy of the Emergency Information Form for EMS providers when they arrive. And, remember to bring necessary equipment like communication devices, walkers or comforting belongings to the hospital. It is never easy to call 911 for a child. But if an emergency does occur, preplanning may reduce anxiety and help ensure the highest quality care.



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