





ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTIVE (21-OPS-02)

DATE: November 17, 2021

To: San Mateo County Prehospital EMS System Providers

FROM: Travis Kusman, MPH, Paramedic, EMS Director 
Greg Gilbert, MD, FAAEM, FAEMS, EMS Medical Director 

SUBJECT: 9-1-1 System Basic Life Support (BLS) Ambulance Response and Transport

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, until such time as prevailing disaster declarations are rescinded or the San Mateo County EMS Agency (EMS Agency) otherwise directs, BLS ambulances operated by approved 911 system transport provider agencies may be routinely assigned by County Public Safety Communications (PSC) to Alpha level (ie. low clinical acuity) responses as determined in accordance with the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS). PSC will also continue the existing practices of assigning BLS ambulances to higher priority calls when an Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance is not available within the system, and in accordance with the Multi-Casualty Incident (MCI) Response Plan.

All patient care decisions shall be made with the best clinical interests of the patient as the primary consideration. The expanded use of BLS ambulances in the 911 system will create opportunity for paramedics to transfer the care of a patient to an EMT provider within our system:

- If an ALS intervention has been performed, transfer of the patient to a BLS provider is not permitted. Transport shall occur as early as possible with a paramedic retaining responsibility as the primary patient care provider. Paramedics shall assure that they have immediate access to all necessary ALS equipment and supplies when providing patient care.
- A patient who has received an ALS assessment and is stable may be transferred to a BLS provider if ALS intervention has not occurred and is not required.
- If an EMT is uncomfortable with accepting care of the patient, the EMT should communicate this to the transferring paramedic and the paramedic shall retain responsibility as the primary patient care provider.
- The Base Hospital shall not be consulted for decisions regarding transfer of patient care from paramedics to EMTs.

If an ALS First Responder Unit (FRU) has encountered and assessed a patient to be in acute status prior



to the arrival of an assigned BLS ambulance, the FRU shall provide a patient update to PSC and request that PSC upgrade the ambulance response. In this circumstance PSC shall:

- Upgrade the responding BLS ambulance to Code 3.
- Assign the closest available ALS ambulance Code 3 if its travel time to the scene is expected to be the same as or shorter than the responding BLS ambulance. Cancel the responding BLS ambulance when the ALS ambulance confirms en-route.

The EMS Agency highly encourages all 911 system providers to review the medications, medical equipment and supplies required to be carried on BLS ambulances (see EQP 1) *and* to refamiliarize themselves with the EMT scope of practice which is defined Policy as well as denoted in Protocols and Procedures via the legend symbol “E.” As highlights, the BLS scope of practice includes but is not limited to the following:

- Use of pulse oximetry and glucometry
- Assisting patients with the administration of physician prescribed devices, including but not limited to: Patient operated medication pumps, sublingual nitroglycerin, and self-administered emergency medications, including epinephrine devices
- Transferring a stable patient, who is deemed appropriate for transfer by basic life support by the transferring physician, and who has nasogastric (NG) tubes, gastrostomy tubes, heparin locks, foley catheters, tracheostomy tubes and/or indwelling vascular access lines, excluding arterial lines

We appreciate the continued support of our EMS system’s prehospital professionals in meeting the needs of San Mateo County residents and visitors through the delivery of exceptional care and service, despite the many challenges associated with the ongoing Pandemic.