

How to use the 911 Emergency Telephone System



What is 911?

- The United States has decided to use the telephone number 911 for emergency response services. This number may be dialed for free from any telephone when an emergency response is required.

When to call 911

Call 911

- To report something which requires a police officer to come (such as someone being attacked or someone being robbed)
- To get an ambulance for emergency medical help
- To report a fire
- To report a crime in progress
- To report unusual or criminal activity (e.g. alarms, gun shots fired, shouts for help, sounds of glass breaking, unfamiliar persons carrying items from a house).

Do not call 911:

- To ask for directions
- To ask about animal control issues such as whether you can own a pet
- To find out if someone is in jail
- To report situations that are not of a police, fire, or medical nature.
- To report a non-emergency medical situation
- To contact someone for community information

What happens when you call 911?

911 calls are answered 6-12 seconds after you call. In some cases there is about 5-6 seconds of silence on your phone before you hear someone answer—DO NOT HANG UP. If you do not speak English it is important that you tell the 911 operator what language you speak. The way that 911 telephone operators help people who don't speak English is done differently in different parts of the United States. A translator may be brought on the line or you may be asked if you are with someone who speaks English. The goal is to get help to you as quickly as possible. Learning a few English words such as “police”, “fire” and “sick” can help.



The 911 operator is required to ask a number of questions to understand the situation and where it is happening. Some of the questions may seem unnecessary, but they are important to make sure that the emergency is clearly understood. This will help make sure the needed help (firefighters, police, ambulance or others) gets to the right place as quickly as possible. Stay on the telephone for as long as you can to guide the operator in getting help to you.

Text- Adapted from the Health Guide For Refugees In Minnesota by the Minnesota Department of Health, Refugee Health Program
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