



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Tom Marshal**  
Incident Commander

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### **Getting Help for Your Illness or Injury During the Pandemic**

With the coronavirus tightening its grip on the hospital and emergency medical systems, the public is left wondering how to best seek treatment when they become sick or injured. For many, their only knowledge of seeking treatment is via ambulances and emergency departments. This however represents but a fraction of the full healthcare system.

"San Bernardino is similar to other counties throughout the region in its approach to providing healthcare to its residents and visitors," says Tom Marshal, Deputy Chief of the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District and Incident Commander of San Bernardino County All-Hazard Incident Management Team #1 (XBO IMT). Primary care providers, physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants, are the frontline for individuals' lifelong healthcare. "These providers develop relationships with their patients through annual check-ups and management of chronic health conditions. They are also an excellent source for emerging illnesses or minor injuries." Primary care providers represent the highest concentration of healthcare providers in the system.

When illnesses or injuries occur outside of normal business hours, or if a patient is traveling, urgent care facilities and health clinics are staffed and equipped to handle these same illnesses and often provide advanced care such as X-rays and wound repair. While not as robust as the primary care system, the extended hours of urgent care facilities, many of which are open 24 hours a day, is a strong support network for the primary care providers. There are more urgent care beds and providers than emergency department beds in the region.

For patients with life threatening illnesses or complex injuries, the emergency department is the destination of choice. This subset of patients can require numerous healthcare workers to support oftentimes involving multiple nurses and physicians for a single patient. Representing the smallest component of the healthcare system, the emergency department is often the first to be overwhelmed resulting in wait times for patients that can last several hours.

When the intensive care unit of a hospital is at capacity, the overflow is to the emergency department. This is due to the training and capabilities of the emergency department staff; however, it creates a shortage of available beds in the ED. ICU patients held in the ED often require the dedication of an ED nurse who may traditionally be able to manage three patients at a time. This lack of beds and staffing creates a backup in the system that cannot be undone as additional patients continue to arrive by ambulance and private vehicle.

Ambulances that arrive with patients at an emergency department that has no open beds are forced to wait. This decreases the number of available ambulances for additional 911 responses. According to Nathan Cooke, Deputy Chief of the Chino Valley Fire District and Deputy Incident Commander of the XBO IMT, "Many agencies have a standard of arriving on scene of a 911 call in under ten minutes, however the effects of a hospital system stretched to its limits creates a trickle-down effect that is now threatening the stability of the 911 emergency medical system."

Now that we understand the current situation, how can we find the best care for ourselves and our loved ones? Utilize the full capacity of the healthcare system. Contact your primary medical provider or nurse advice line for routine medical concerns or to discuss your symptoms. If it's an urgent situation such as the need for a prescription refill or a minor laceration that may need to be sutured, urgent cares stand ready to help.

Recently, paramedics and EMT's in San Bernardino County who respond to 911 calls and determine that a patient is stable and not suffering from any life-threatening or life disabling event began educating and referring patients into these alternate avenues of the healthcare system. Per Chief Marshal, "This has resulted in the mutual benefits of ensuring patients receive appropriate care for their current complaint, decreasing the workload of the emergency departments and keeping ambulances available for the critically ill and/or injured."

Calling 911 for advice is never appropriate nor shall call-takers provide advice during the call. Seeking ambulance transport to an emergency department for a COVID test in order to work or travel or in hopes of receiving the COVID vaccine is likewise inappropriate and serves only to further stress a system that is at its limit.

No one wants to be sick, especially around the holiday season. With the triple threat of colds, flu, and coronavirus, your safest actions remain frequent hand washing, sanitizing commonly touched surfaces, limiting contact with others to essential activities, and wearing a mask when social distancing cannot be maintained. We are all in this together. Help us help you.

For more information and current recommendations, please go to [www.sbcovid19.gov](http://www.sbcovid19.gov).

The XBO IMT is an "All-Hazard" incident management team comprised of members from fire agencies throughout San Bernardino county along with the San Bernardino County Sheriff. Tasked with providing on-scene incident management support during incidents or events that exceed a jurisdiction's or agency's capability or capacity, XBO IMT applies its knowledge and expertise to support large fires that extend beyond the initial attack phase, mass gathering events such as the annual NASCAR race in Fontana, concerts at Glen Helen Amphitheater and mass casualty incidents such as the Inland Regional Center shootings on December 2, 2015. Incident management teams provide the five functions of Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance and operate under a delegation of authority from the local jurisdiction.