



New ambulance standards announced by NHS England

A new way of working for ambulance services will be implemented across the country to ensure patients get the right response, first time.

This is following the largest clinical ambulance trial in the world and will update a decades old system. The demand for ambulance services is increasing every year but despite this, the way ambulance care is provided has broadly stayed the same.

These changes focus on making sure the best, high quality, most appropriate response is provided for each patient first time. They are designed to change the rules on targets so they are met by doing the right thing for the patient.

Under the current standards life-threatening and emergency calls should be responded to in eight minutes. This means that the ambulance service often send more than one vehicle to have the best chance of meeting the eight minute target. This frustrates ambulance staff and is inefficient.

Ending this out of date target will free up more vehicles and staff to respond to emergencies.

For a stroke patient this means that the ambulance service will be able to send an ambulance to convey them to hospital, when a motorbike or rapid response vehicle would 'stop the clock' but not get them the treatment they need.

From now on stroke patients will get to hospital or a specialist stroke unit quicker because the most appropriate vehicle can be sent first time.

Under the new system early recognition of life-threatening conditions, particularly cardiac arrest, would also increase. A new set of pre-triage questions identifies those patients in need of the fastest response.

Historically ambulance services are allowed up to 60 seconds from receiving a call to sending a vehicle. Giving call handlers more time to assess 999 calls that are not immediately life-threatening will enable them to identify patients' needs better and send the most appropriate response.

For the first time response targets will apply to every single patient, not just those in immediate need.

So, in future there will be four categories of call.

Category one is for calls about people with life-threatening injuries and illnesses. These will be responded to in an average time of seven minutes.

Category two is for emergency calls. These will be responded to in an average time of 18 minutes.

Category three is for urgent calls. In some instances you may be treated by ambulance staff in your own home. These types of calls will be responded to at least 9 out of 10 times within 120 minutes.

Category four is for less urgent calls. In some instances you may be given advice over the telephone or referred to another service such as a GP or pharmacist. These less urgent calls will be responded to at least 9 out of 10 times within 180 minutes.

This redesigned system for ambulance services in England focusses on ensuring patients get rapid life-saving, life-changing treatment and is strongly endorsed by expert organisations such as the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, the Stroke Association, and the College of Paramedics.