



County of San Diego

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October 28, 2020

SAFE EMS HANDOFFS AND TRANSFER OF CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

County of San Diego EMS actively monitors, and reports to the State, Emergency Department (ED) offload times and practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many standard practices have been appropriately adapted to mitigate infectious risk. There are unique hazards associated with treating known or suspected COVID-19 patients in the prehospital setting. County EMS issued guidance on April 5, 2020 regarding these hazards and outlining [safe EMS handoff practices](#). County EMS has become aware that some of these safe ED handoff practices have evolved in a less than optimal fashion. One troubling trend poses a risk to patients, EMTs, paramedics, and other EMS personnel.

Transfer of Care (TOC) times are one of the many metrics monitored 24/7 by County EMS to assure access to quality and timely care in our organized EMS delivery system. These TOC times have been increasingly rising, and [extended offload delays](#) are more common. Recently, and not infrequently, these times have increased above pre-pandemic levels. This rise is not exclusive to San Diego County, and similar occurrences have been seen throughout California. Exceptionally long TOC times leave the 911 EMS delivery system severely stressed due to ambulances held outside (and prehospital personnel waiting inside) EDs while attending to their patients for prolonged periods. **As these offload delay times have increased, there have been instances where EMS patients have been held in the ambulance outside of the ED beyond times authorized by the safe ED handoff guidance.**

Under no circumstance shall EMS personnel be expected, nor permitted, to hold patients in the ambulance outside of the receiving ED for longer than is reasonably necessary to ensure safe ED handoffs. Please notify the EMS Duty Officer (available 24/7) at 619-588-0397 for events exceeding the time needed for safe ED handoff.

Thank you for the outstanding care you provide to our patients, day in and day out. We recognize and appreciate your dedication during the special conditions of this pandemic.

Respectfully,

Kristi L. Koenig, MD, FACEP, FIFEM, FAEMS, Medical Director
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cc: Nick Yphantides, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer
Andrew Parr, EMS Administrator