

Chapter: COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
Key Words: Policy/Procedure/Protocol

SUBJECT: Air Medical Support Utilization

POLICY NO: A-475

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DATE: July 1, 2016

AUTHORITY: Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Sections 1797.204, 1797.206, 1797.218, and 1798; California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8; and San Diego County Ambulance Ordinance, No. 10274.

I. PURPOSE

To define criteria for patient transport via helicopter based on medical necessity within the County of San Diego, Emergency Medical Services (CoSD EMS) system.

II. POLICY

Patients shall be transported to hospitals via ground ambulance unless such transport is unavailable, or if ground transport is significantly longer than air transport (and this difference in time may negatively impact the patient's condition). The CoSD EMS system shall include the utilization of authorized air medical resources.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Utilization of Air Ambulance

Helicopter transportation of patients should be considered for cases that meet the following criteria:

1. Ground transport time to the appropriate hospital exceeds 30 minutes and the helicopter can deliver the patient to the hospital in a shorter time than the ground unit based on the time the patient is ready for transport, or a patient whose condition requires advanced skills not available on a paramedic unit.
2. Any one or more of the following patient conditions:
 - a. Patients with critical traumatic injuries
 - b. Uncontrolled hemorrhage
 - c. Hypotensive/shock
 - d. Critical burns

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- e. Spinal cord injuries with neurologic dysfunction
- f. Vascular compromise in a limb or amputation
- g. Barotrauma (consider altitude)
- h. Snake bite with signs of significant envenomation
- i. Drowning
- j. Status epilepticus
- k. Cardiovascular instability
 - l. Acute stroke with significant deficits less than six hours
- m. Critical respiratory patients
- n. Other injuries or medical problems in area inaccessible to (or with prolonged extrication or prolonged Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) for ground units)
- o. Conditions subject to the approval of the Base Hospital Physician

B. Contraindications to Transport

1. When ground transport time is equal to or shorter than air transport time
2. Trauma resource patients (except in areas inaccessible to ground units)

C. Relative Contraindications to Transport

1. Adult patients in cardiac arrest
2. Potentially violent patients or those with behavioral emergencies
3. Stable patients (except in areas inaccessible to ground units)

D. Utilization of Advanced Life Support (ALS) Rescue Aircraft

1. Utilize for rescue/rendezvous purposes primarily. Rescue aircraft (Basic Life Support (BLS)/ALS) usual function is not prehospital emergency transport but may be utilized for prehospital emergency patient transport when use of an air or ground ambulance is inappropriate or unavailable.

E. Utilization of Auxiliary Rescue Aircraft

1. Utilize for rescue/rendezvous purposes only and shall not be for transportation to a medical facility.

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2. Patient care shall be transferred after rescue efforts to the provider on scene with the most appropriate level of care required by patient condition.
3. ALS or BLS ground transport providers shall not transport the patient via auxiliary rescue aircraft to a medical facility.