

You Call 9-1-1: Then What?

Riverside County hospital emergency department delays
may impact your care



**Riverside County Civil Grand Jury
2022-2023**

SUMMARY

The purpose of this Riverside County Civil Grand Jury report is to educate the public about the ambulance delay issues at hospital emergency departments. Timely treatment at hospital emergency departments are of the utmost importance for every resident or anyone needing such emergency medical care. Nearly 80% of all 9-1-1 calls are for medical issues and as the population in the Riverside County has increased significantly, the demand is even more acute.¹ The need for 9-1-1 fire calls diminished due to improvements in building code regulations, as well as fire prevention and education.

Riverside County Emergency Medical System Agency (REMSA) is a county department within the Emergency Management Department (EMD). REMSA collects specific data on delays. The definition of Ambulance Patient Offload Delays (APOD) is delays of more than 30 minutes of transfer of care from the ambulance to the hospital emergency department. Daily, weekly and monthly reports are developed which are available to the public, hospitals and government officials detailing the status of APOD issues.

When a call is placed to 9-1-1 for emergency medical services, protocol dictates that dispatchers must send both a Fire Rescue team, as well as an ambulance. American Medical Response (AMR) is the contracted ambulance provider for Riverside County. AMR transports the patient to the nearest or designated hospital as appropriate for the type of medical issue being addressed. High acuity patients (i.e., trauma, stroke or heart) are transported to the closest specialty accredited hospital.

Patients with non-life threatening medical issues are transported to hospitals based on dispatch information. Once patients arrive at the hospital emergency entrance, patients have experienced undue delays of being seen and cared for by hospital medical personnel. There is a direct impact on the patient's care and timeliness of being seen by hospital staff. Delays vary by hospital.

County departments, state government and professional organizations have investigated and reported on APOD. Time delays at the hospital emergency departments have not improved in any significant way. Several recommendations in this report may mitigate these issues.

¹ Riverside County Fire/Medical Emergency Command Center & Dispatch, topic: APOD, January 10, 2023, Interview.

BACKGROUND

Riverside County government is responsible for the public safety of its residents. Services provided include police, fire, ambulance, and medical care. The public relies on emergency medical services to deal with medical crises. One way the public communicates their emergency needs is through the 9-1-1 system. As the Riverside County population grew, likewise the demand for emergency services increased. According to the 2020 census the population of Riverside County is 2.4 million, making it the fourth most populated county in California and the tenth most populated county in the country. Riverside County covers 7,303 square miles.²

Emergency services have changed over the past 50 years. The 9-1-1 dispatch process was well-established by the 1970s. The Federal Emergency Medical Services Systems Act of 1973 established the Emergency Medical System (EMS). The act established funding for future planning and growth for emergency medical services.

As stated, the number of structure fires, nationwide, began to decline due to improved building codes and fire prevention programs. Fire departments are first responders to other types of emergency calls, including medical calls. Fire departments have medical equipment on their vehicles. The fire teams now include a paramedic for each vehicle.

Riverside County Fire Department and municipal fire departments were the first responders to over 190,000 9-1-1 calls for medical and fire incidents in 2022.³ In addition to fire departments' responses to fire emergency calls, ambulances are deployed for emergency medical calls.

There are 17 hospitals in Riverside County:

- Corona Regional Medical Center
- Desert Regional Medical Center
- Eisenhower Health
- Hemet Valley Hospital
- Inland Valley Medical Center
- JFK Hospital

² US Census Bureau, 2020 census, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/riversidecountycalifornia>

³ Riverside County Fire/Medical Emergency Command Center & Dispatch, topic: APOD, January 10, 2023, Interview.