



### **The new pandemic threat: People may die because they're not calling 911**

Reports from the front lines of hospitals indicate a marked drop in the number of heart attacks and strokes nationally. But, COVID-19 is definitely not stopping people from having heart attacks, strokes and cardiac arrests. We fear it is stopping people from going to the hospital and that can be devastating.

You might think a hospital is the *last* place you should go now. That's why we – the leaders of major national organizations dedicated to saving people from heart disease and stroke – feel it's necessary to say this loud and clear:

Calling 911 immediately is still your best chance of surviving or saving a life.

It is SAFE for EVERYONE to call 911.

It is SAFE for ANYONE to go to the hospital.

Because some racial/ethnic groups, such as African Americans, are more likely to die from their heart attack and stroke, it is imperative that nothing gets in the way of anyone seeking help if they are experiencing symptoms.

We felt the need to make this declaration to clear up what may become an alarming trend.

The number of heart attacks and strokes are not necessarily declining. While ongoing research may uncover other underlying reasons for decreasing numbers of heart attack and stroke patients in hospitals, the prevailing theory is that people just aren't calling 911.

From dispatchers to first responders, the emergency response system is trained to help you safely and quickly, even during a pandemic.

Hospitals are following protocols to sanitize, socially distance and keep infected people away from others. In fact, many now have separate emergency rooms, operating rooms, cardiac catheterization rooms and ICUs for people with COVID-19, and for people without.

Although COVID-19 is certainly our most immediate threat, we must remember the ever-lurking dangers of heart disease and stroke – which, year in and year out, are the top two killers worldwide.

- Approximately every 40 seconds someone in the US will have a heart attack and someone else will have a stroke.
- More than 350,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the U.S. annually.

People at higher risk of a stroke or cardiac event should contact their providers for a telehealth visit to ensure they are managing their risk factors, such as blood pressure, and taking other precautions.

If you or a loved one experiences heart attack warning signs –chest discomfort; discomfort in other areas of the body such as your arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach; shortness of breath; and other possible signs: breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness – call 911.

If you have stroke symptoms, which can be remembered with the acronym FAST: **F**ace drooping, **A**rm weakness, **S**peech slurring or other difficulty, then it's **T**ime to call 911.

The bottom line is the same as it's always been. When a medical emergency strikes, call 911. Get to a hospital.

Signed,

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