

When to call 911

Easy · 10 min to read · Free

Call 911 whenever someone needs police, fire or an ambulance right now, including choking, not breathing, severe chest pain, sudden weakness on one side, a seizure over a minute, heavy bleeding, a fire, or a crime in progress. Say the location first (address plus apartment or room number), then your phone number and what's happening. Follow the call-taker's instructions and don't hang up until they say so, even if you dialed by accident. Voice beats text. Any cell phone can call 911, but one without service can't send your location.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A phone. Any cell phone can call 911, even without service.
- ☐ Your exact address, including apartment or room number

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Call 911 for any situation that needs immediate help from police, the fire department or an ambulance.**
- 2 **Lead with the location: street address, plus room or apartment number in a large building.** In a dorm or a new place, learn the address now so you're not guessing later.
- 3 **Then give the phone number you're calling from, what the emergency is, and details: injuries or symptoms, what a fire looks like, or a description of a person who committed a crime.**
- 4 **Answer every question.** The questions help send the right help to the right place quickly.
- 5 **Do what the call-taker says.** Many 911 centers can walk you through helping someone who's choking or needs first aid or CPR until help arrives.
- 6 **Don't hang up until they tell you to.**

Watch out Dialed 911 by mistake? Don't hang up. Hanging up can make them think there's an emergency and send responders. Stay on and explain.

DAD NOTE *Location first. Everything else comes after they know where to send help.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/body/first-aid-basics/when-to-call-911/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: 911.gov; Federal Communications Commission; MedlinePlus (National Library of Medicine); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Poison Control (National Capital Poison Center).