



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY
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St. Mary's County Department of Emergency Services Seeks Public's Assistance to Alleviate Hospital Emergency Department Overload in the Face of COVID-19 Surge

LEONARDTOWN, MD – The St. Mary's County Department of Emergency Services is asking St. Mary's County residents to help alleviate the unprecedented strain that COVID-19 and its emerging variants have placed on the area's emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, frontline responders, and hospitals.

COVID-19 infections continue to spread rapidly throughout Maryland. Increased numbers of hospitalizations have led to longer patient wait times in the area's emergency departments (ED), as well as a shortage of available staffed beds in hospitals. Healthcare facilities are being required to triage (sort) patients as they arrive to ensure the sickest receive treatment first. In some cases, ED patients with non-life-threatening emergencies may wait for extended periods, some exceeding 24 hours. Consequently, calling 9-1-1 for an ambulance does not guarantee faster care in the ED. Because local hospitals may be full, ambulances may be required to take patients to other regions. This takes EMS units out of their communities for extended periods, making them less available for urgent 9-1-1 calls such as heart attacks and vehicle accidents.

In light of this unprecedented burden on EMS personnel, hospital staff, and our health system, the St. Mary's County Department of Emergency Services is seeking the community's assistance in the following ways:

- Avoid going to EDs for minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, and low-grade fevers. Instead, seek non-emergency care from primary care physicians or urgent care centers.
- Do not go to an ED just to obtain a COVID-19 test. Instead, go to an approved COVID-19 testing site: <https://smchd.org/covid-19-testing/> or use a home test kit.
- Limit 9-1-1 EMS calls to possible life-threatening conditions.
- Get vaccinated and/or receive the COVID-19 booster and encourage others to do the same.
- Help limit COVID-19 transmission by socially distancing, washing hands regularly, and wearing a mask.
- Limit exposure to others, especially if there has been close contact with someone known to have COVID-19 or there are COVID-19 symptoms.

By following these guidelines, the St. Mary's County community can help decrease COVID-19 transmission and, in so doing, decrease the number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. For more information about COVID-19 and related resources, visit <https://smchd.org/coronavirus/or> <https://covidlink.maryland.gov/content/>.