



TITLE

**INTER-FACILITY TRANSFERS DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER SITUATIONS**

SCOPE

Provincial: Emergency Medical Services

DOCUMENT #

PS-EMS-04

APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Senior Provincial Director and Chief Paramedic

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SPONSOR

Provincial Air Ambulance Operations and Inter-Facility  
Patient Transfer Strategy

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Not applicable

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**NOTE:** The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

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## OBJECTIVES

- Alberta Health Services (AHS), Emergency Medical Services (EMS) physicians, **Emergency Communication Officers (ECO)**, **EMS Management**, and EMS staff will use the information and direction within this policy to make decisions about delaying or cancelling an Inter-Facility Transfer (IFT) during **inclement weather** conditions.
- EMS, through a consultative process, may delay or cancel an IFT if the weather and road conditions, based on the most reliable sources available, would pose a safety risk to the patient, the public or EMS staff.

## PRINCIPLES

- Investigators have identified inclement weather conditions as a significant causative factor in collisions.

## APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary). Working within or for Emergency Medical Services.

## ELEMENTS

### 1. Decision-making for IFT in Inclement Weather Conditions:

- 1.1 The assigned EMS personnel concerned about the ability to safely undertake IFT during inclement weather situations will immediately report their concern to their **Team Lead** or **Supervisor**.
- 1.2 The EMS Team Lead or Supervisor will notify the **Deployment Manager** or designate at the communications centre that is responsible for dispatching the event where the inclement weather is of concern.
- 1.3 The EMS Team Lead or Supervisor or the Deployment Manager or designate may also initiate the decision process for safely undertaking an IFT during inclement weather conditions.
- 1.4 The EMS Team Lead or Supervisor or Deployment Manager or designate will obtain weather and road conditions information from the most appropriate reporting site/s including:
  - a) Law Enforcement Agencies
  - b) 511 (both on-line and by telephone)
  - c) Front line staff
  - d) Provincial Government Roadway Maintenance (when available)
- 1.5 Weather and road condition information will include:
  - a) Gathering the weather forecast taking into consideration both the transport and the return.
  - b) Gathering the weather information at the sending location as well as the receiving location.
  - c) Gathering road condition information for all possible transport routes to the sending facility.
- 1.6 The weather information gathered will be documented as part of the event information in **Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)**.
  - a) Insert the canned comment "Inclement Weather Policy Activated" and,
  - b) Name of responsible EMS Team Lead or Supervisor who made the decision and,
  - c) Weather information source and reasons for the decision as provided by the Team Lead or Supervisor.

- 1.7 The EMS Team Lead or Supervisor will follow-up with the EMS personnel to provide an update as to the status of the IFT and to gather additional weather information from their location (when applicable) that will further assist in the decision making process.
  - 1.8 The EMS Deployment Manager or designate will contact the department of the sending facility to advise of the cancellation or delay due to inclement weather.
2. For IFT's that have been deemed as being **Red Matrix** or **Yellow Matrix**; in accordance to the AHS IFT Patient Transfer Matrix Guidelines or if the patient's clinical situation warrants:
- 2.1 The EMS Deployment Manager or designate will initiate a conference call if considering delaying or cancelling the IFT due to inclement weather. The conference will include the:
    - a) **Sending Physician**,
    - b) EMS Team Lead or Supervisor from the area with questionable weather,
    - c) **Transport Physician** and/or **On Line Medical Control (OLMC)** (when required),
    - d) Central Communications Centre Emergency Communications Officer for Air Ambulance/STARS (when required),
    - e) Referral, Access, Advice, Placement, Information & Destination (RAAPID),
    - f) **Receiving Physician** (when required).
  - 2.2 The EMS Team Lead or Supervisor from the sending area will make a decision regarding the IFT based on an assessment of the following; the:
    - a) Potential safety risk for the patient, the public and EMS staff if the IFT is undertaken,
    - b) Potential safety risk for EMS staff during the return trip to the original destination,
    - c) Availability of alternative modes of transport.
  - 2.3 The ECO managing the event will document will document the following in the CAD Comments:
    - a) Insert the canned comment "Inclement Weather Policy Activated" and,
    - b) Name of responsible EMS Team Lead or Supervisor who made the decision and,

- c) Weather information source and reasons for decision as provided by the Team Lead or Supervisor.

### 3. When weather conditions deteriorate during an IFT:

- 3.1 Above process will be used to determine if the IFT will continue, be delayed or will be cancelled. If a patient needs to remain unexpectedly at a facility for a period of time, the EMS Team Lead or Supervisor will notify the EMS Deployment Manager who will then link in the facility On-Call Manager to the conference call described in 2.1.

### 4. Resuming Transport:

- 4.1 All available options will be taken into consideration when determining next steps and EMS will work collaboratively to resume movement of the patient as soon as it is safe to do so, as determined by the EMS Team Lead or Supervisor. Once an inclement weather transport delay/cancellation decision has been made.
- 4.2 It is unacceptable to re-task the transport to another EMS crew or service until the EMS Team Lead or Supervisor determines if it safe to resume transport.

## DEFINITIONS

**Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)** means an Incident Management system that provides call-center and communications center operators with tools that they need to field calls, create and update incidents, and manage an organization's critical resources by providing real-time interaction of crucial data.

**EMS Deployment Manager** means a leadership role within a dispatch centre that reports to a Communications Director.

**EMS Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centers** means under the mandate of the Emergency Health Services Act, responsible to receive community requests for EMS and inter-facility transport requests from health care sites along with the deployment and dispatching of all ground and fixed wing EMS resources in Alberta through three AHS dispatch centers and three contracted satellite dispatch centers.

**EMS Management** means EMS staff at the Supervisor level and higher or staff specified by the Executive Director.

**Emergency Communication Officer (ECO)** means an officer who answers; call evaluates, and delivers emergency communications from a caller to the appropriate party following approved guidelines from Alberta Health Services (AHS) Medical Direction and International Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch.

**Inclement weather** means the existence abnormal climatic conditions (whether they are those of hail, snow, cold, high wind, tornados, severe dust, storm, extreme high temperature or the like or any combination thereof) by virtue of which it is either not reasonable or not safe for employees exposed thereto to continue working whilst the same prevail.

**On-Line Medical Consultation (OLMC)** means a physician providing consultation and medical control over a radio, by phone or through some other form of instant communication, the Emergency Medical Service

**Receiving Physician** means the Physician accepting care at the destination facility.

**Red Matrix** means a patient who has a critical clinical condition requiring an emergent response and transfer to a typically higher level of care or patient experiencing an unstable time dependent emergency as identified by the sending physician or most responsible practitioner.

**Sending Physician** means the Physician from the hospital where the patient is originating from.

**Supervisor** means a leadership role in EMS that reports directly to a Manager. This position is responsible and accountable for providing frontline direction and leadership towards the activities of EMS in support of the vision, mission and business plan of AHS. A supervisor can be from either a direct delivery service or a contracted provider.

**Team Lead** means a leadership role in EMS that reports directly to a Supervisor. This position is responsible and accountable for making front line operational decisions and having direct leadership responsibility towards the achievement of the goals of the EMS.

**Transport Physician** means the physician who supports red/critical patient processes and all medical consultation needs for Air Ambulance.

**Yellow Matrix** means a patient requiring a higher level of specialized level of care not available at the sending site. The illness or injury is potentially life threatening and the patient may typically require transport that cannot be delayed for more than one hour. In some cases the transport timing (ETA) is coordinated by AHS EMS Dispatch in collaboration with the sending and receiving physicians and is based on bed availability. An additional component of Yellow is Capacity Management – A patient being moved from high priority areas to support site capacity challenges but may not have an urgent clinical condition.

## REFERENCES

- Appendix A: *OH&S Recommendations*
- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
  - *AHS Inter-Facility Transport Services Patient Transport Matrix Guideline*
  - *Inclement Weather Transfers Directive*
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
  - *Best Practices for the Assessment and Control of Physical Hazards. Best Practice Guidelines for OH&S in Healthcare. Government of Alberta, 2011*

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**Appendix A****OH&S RECOMMENDATIONS**

Winter driving in Alberta can be hazardous as a result of decreased visibility, poor road conditions and decreased vehicle performance. It is important to evaluate road conditions and consider not travelling if conditions are bad.

- The employer should develop a policy to guide workers and supervisors in evaluating driving conditions and determining when it is unsafe to drive.
- A worker should consider turning back or seeking shelter if weather and road conditions are unsafe. If visibility is poor, a worker should find a place to safely pull over as soon as possible.
- Travel routes should be planned ahead to time and working alone requirements should be addressed.

*Best Practices for the Assessment and Control of Physical Hazards.*