

# Call handler/emergency medical dispatcher

Call handlers deal with emergency calls from the public and medical dispatchers make sure that the right help gets there as soon as possible.

## Working life

Call handlers and emergency medical dispatchers work in ambulance control rooms as part of a team.



Working quickly and calmly, call handlers take essential details about the patient's condition and location, logging the information onto a computer system. The information is then passed to an emergency medical dispatcher who makes decisions about how best to handle the situation.

Thinking fast, multi-tasking and using their initiative, call handlers and emergency medical dispatchers often work under great pressure. They might deal with life-or-death emergencies such as a major incident, a heart attack or drug overdose, or be faced with a situation such as a child with a suspected broken leg.



In extreme cases, they may have to talk a member of the public through an emergency procedure, such as clearing an obstruction from someone's airway. Or they might need to persuade someone they should visit their GP or emergency department rather than sending an emergency vehicle to them.

Emergency medical dispatchers receive details of 999 calls via the exchange operator for someone requesting an ambulance. Using their training, they ask a series of questions to ensure the most appropriate help is dispatched. They use a triage system to assess the type of emergency and determine the response needed, for example ambulance, rapid response car, motorcycle or air ambulance.

While the clinicians are on their way, the emergency medical dispatcher can pass them further essential details so they can go into action when they reach the scene. The pace can be furious and they could need to dispatch 15 vehicles an hour as well as dealing with queries from crews.

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Some ambulance trusts combine the roles of call handler and emergency medical dispatcher, and there are opportunities to work as a call handler with the NHS 111 service.

NHS 111 call handlers handle calls from members of the public about non-emergency health problems. They will typically use specialist computer software to provide the caller with an appropriate response to their healthcare needs within a timeframe.

## **Who will I work with?**

Call handlers and emergency medical dispatchers may speak to the patients themselves. They may also deal with GPs, health centre staff (medical and non-medical), other healthcare professionals and other emergency services.

## Training and development

Training for emergency call handlers and dispatchers includes:

- using the call centre equipment and software
- customer care
- communication skills
- first aid
- prioritising calls
- giving telephone advice

## Want to learn more?

- [Find out more about the entry requirements for emergency medical dispatchers/call handlers.](#) <sup>[1]</sup>
- Pay and conditions

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Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the [Agenda for Change \(AfC\) pay scales](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and emergency medical dispatchers and call handlers are usually at bands 2 or 3. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. Although emergency medical dispatchers and call handlers work standard hours of around 37.5 a week, these are on a shift pattern. Shifts cover 24 hours a day, 7 days a week throughout the year. So an emergency medical dispatcher or call handler's work pattern includes evenings, nights, early starts, weekends and bank holidays.

Terms and conditions can vary for employers outside of the NHS.

- Where the role can lead

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You could progress to become a team leader or supervisor. You would be in charge of a team of call handlers or dispatchers, responsible for allocating work and drawing up schedules. With further experience you could become a duty manager, responsible for the call centre during a shift.

You could take further training to become an emergency care assistant. With more experience, you could apply to train as a paramedic. You would have to pass entrance exams and meet other requirements before being accepted onto a paramedic course.

- Job market and vacancies

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Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on [NHS Jobs](#) [3], including those who run NHS services. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations at [NHS Choices](#) [4].

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the [NHS Constitution](#) [5] apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS. [Find out more about NHS values.](#) [6]

## Other roles that may interest you

- [Experienced paramedic](#) [7]
- [Emergency care assistant](#) [8]
- [Clinical informatics](#) [9]
- [Health records staff](#) [10]

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**Source URL:** <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/emergency-medical-dispatchercall-handler>

### Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/emergency-medical-dispatchercall-handler/entry-requirements>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

[3] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>

[4] <http://www.nhs.uk/service-search>

[5] [https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NHS\\_Constitution](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NHS_Constitution)

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>

[7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/experienced-paramedic>

[8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/emergency-care-assistant>

[9] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/health-informatics/roles-health-informatics/clinical-informatics>

[10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/health-records-staff>