

# **TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES**

## **Ground and Air Ambulance Utilization Criteria for Statewide Disaster and Hurricane Evacuation**

**July 19, 2006**

### **Assumptions/Background**

Licensed/staffed ambulances are in limited supply in Texas.

Local areas must maintain adequate ambulance coverage to meet the needs of residents even during a potential or actual disaster situation elsewhere in the state.

During a mass evacuation, ambulances are needed in local evacuation areas to transport special medical needs individuals to embarkation points from hospitals, nursing homes, evacuation relay points, and residences and from destination arrival sites to hospitals, nursing homes, and shelters.

Ambulances can carry only 1-2 patients at a time and therefore are not an efficient methodology for evacuating/transporting special medical needs individuals over long distances. In general, situations in which ground transport of a special medical needs individuals would take more than one hour one-way, an alternative method to a ground ambulance should be considered.

After Action Reviews conducted following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated that, in some cases, ambulances were over-utilized because alternate means of transport weren't available or weren't considered for a number of reasons, including concerns about not adhering to traditional methods of patient transportation.

### **Ground Ambulance Utilization Criteria:**

Only patients who meet one of following criteria should be considered for transport by ground ambulance:

1. Medical oxygen being provided at greater than 4 liters per minute,
2. Continuous hemodynamic and cardiac monitoring is required,
3. Continuous intravenous (IV) medication drip that requires monitoring, such as an IV pump or similar method for delivering precise amounts (“to keep open” IVs, Peg tubes, and vitamin drips would not fall into this category), or
4. Orthopedic injuries that require appliances or other acute medical conditions that would prohibit the patient from traveling on an alternate method of transport (e.g. active labor; cervical traction; unstable pelvic fracture)

### **Air Ambulance Utilization Criteria\*:**

Only patients who meet one of following criteria should be considered for transport by air ambulance:

Transfers from one critical care area to another critical care area (e.g., intensive care unit ((ICU)); cardiac care unit ((CCU)); pediatric intensive care unit ((PICU)); burn unit);

2. Continuous intravenous vasoactive medications or blood products (e.g., nipride; dopamine; neosynephrine; etc.);
3. Emergent surgical interventions; or
4. Acute medical conditions requiring special interventions (e.g., active labor; evolving stroke; intra-aortic balloon pump ((IABP)); left ventricular assist device ((LVAD)) ; continuous veno-venous hemodialysis ((CVVHD)); isolette transports with advanced life support ((ALS)) interventions; etc.)

***\* Note: these criteria DO NOT apply to Texas National Guard and/or US Department of Defense aircraft used in a region-wide evacuation.***

*Effective July 19, 2006*

*Texas Department of State Health Services  
Regulatory Division  
Office of EMS/Trauma Systems Coordination  
1100 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, TX 78756  
512-834-6700*