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Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Visitors:

The rise of the Coronavirus COVID-19 has cast our country and our community into interesting times. Everyone is concerned with the possibility of contracting this virus for which we have no immunity, and the need for self-isolation and social distancing only increases our anxiety. But remember that we are all in this together, and we will all get through this together if we use common sense and take a few extra precautions when out in public.

However, because we are all in this together, it is more important now than ever before to remember that Washburn's ambulance service is staffed by volunteers who have "regular jobs" or are retirees who do this because they believe in serving the community. So instead of a small group of people waiting around the ambulance garage, 911 calls are responded to by people leaving work or their children (all of whom are at home right now), or by people who are in the most vulnerable age bracket for infection. To ensure that EMTs and an ambulance are available when they are most needed, we offer a few things to keep in mind during these trying times:

1. If you have a fever of more than 100 degrees, a cough, and shortness of breath, Memorial Medical Center in Ashland would like you to start an E-visit on their website (www.essentiahealth.org/covid-19/covid-19-screening/) before coming to the hospital. E-visits allow a physician or advanced practitioner to evaluate your symptoms and provide care or self-quarantine instructions right away, without you having to leave your house. E-visits are free during this pandemic.
2. If you skip the E-visit and call an ambulance, but you do not have all of the symptoms, EMTs may call the ER from your house after doing an initial assessment, and the hospital staff may instruct us not to transport you. This is an important part of how we as health care providers are ensuring that the health care system is not overwhelmed.
3. If you are seriously ill, and we do take you to the hospital in an ambulance, please know that arriving at the hospital in an ambulance does not promise you faster care. Hospital staff will continue to treat those with the most life-threatening issues first. Therefore, if you've done an E-visit and still need to see a doctor, but you are not experiencing severe respiratory distress, please ask a friend, family member, or even a neighbor to take you to the hospital. And when you go, protect those who are helping you out by wearing a mask or scarf (something to cover your nose and mouth) on your way to the hospital, so you don't infect them or anyone else.
4. We receive many calls to help people who have fallen and are unable to get up. We respond to these calls with the same urgency as we do for a person suffering a stroke or other serious health problem, but in this time of heightened risk, the ambulance service should not be your first choice for a lift assist if there is a family member, friend, or neighbor nearby who can help.

Without doubt, call 911 if you are experiencing persistent pain or pressure in your chest, new confusion or inability to wake up, and bluish lips or face. These are severe symptoms that require immediate attention. Wear a mask, or scarf, if possible and let the ambulance staff know that you may have COVID-19.

We will continue to respond to all 911 calls because that is what we are here to do. But in these unusual times, we simply ask that everyone practice a bit of self-care when possible — help each other out, check on your neighbors and friends, and ask for help when you need it. That way, we all help to ensure that the sickest among us get the care they need as soon as possible.

Thank you, be safe, keep calm, and wash your hands.

Scott J. Kluver
City Administrator

Dan Clark
Ambulance Director