

Vail Health

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HEALTH CARE HEROES

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WHAT'S YOUR EMERGENCY?



Vail Health's new hospital was built to handle emergencies more safely, swiftly and with the highest attention to the patient experience.

FROM AMBULANCE TO DISCHARGE, A STEP-BY-STEP JOURNEY THROUGH VAIL HEALTH'S NEW HOSPITAL

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When an emergency arises, it's difficult to balance the emotions of fear, panic and worry with the need to handle the imminent injury or illness. But knowing you or a loved one is in good hands should help quell some of the concerns so you can focus on getting help. In Eagle County, the journey from calling 9-1-1 to recovering back in your home follows specific paths that are lined with exceptional caregivers from paramedics and EMTs to doctors, nurses and therapists. In addition, Vail Health's new and expanded hospital was built with great intention to treat everything from a broken bone or torn ligament, to a traumatic injury and even a heart attack. Though every situation is different, professionals are prepared to offer the very best care to each patient. If there comes a time when you need emergency care, here's what you can expect.

GETTING TO THE HOSPITAL

When you call 9-1-1, the Vail Public Safety Communications Center dispatches first responders to your address. In the case of a medical emergency or trauma, Eagle County Paramedic Services (ECPS) arrives in an ambulance. Unlike in many other rural areas, ECPS is a dedicated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agency—EMS is its sole focus. These paramedics and EMTs are qualified to provide the absolute best in out-of-hospital care. In addition to intensive medical and on-the-job training, these paramedics are often certified in critical care medicine and/or wilderness rescue.

When you arrive at Vail Health Hospital, the ambulance pulls directly into new, covered, heated bays that were designed to protect patients from the elements. This is a welcome change from the previous entrance, which was exposed to the outdoors.

“There’s a huge benefit in not having to unload somebody in the rain or snow,” says Will Dunn, senior clinical services manager at Eagle County Paramedic Services. “Patients already have enough going on when they’re being transported by ambulance. To be able to do that inside is one less thing that is going to negatively affect the patient. There are only so many variables that we can control in paramedicine. Being able to control the weather is a good one.”

Once inside, paramedics will transport you from the ambulance into the hospital, wheeling you into the Emergency Department (ED), where Vail Health’s emergency care team is waiting to receive you. Paramedics then deliver a “hand-off” report, which includes information such as a description of the problem as relayed and observed, vital signs, treatments given and other important information. You will then be transferred from the gurney onto a bed in the Emergency Department.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Enhancements in the new Emergency Department directly impact patient care. Previously, there were three private rooms; now there are 13, resulting in more privacy for patients. Those in a mental health crisis are seen by behavioral health clinicians in the Emergency Department’s new dedicated behavioral health rooms. Centralized nurses’ stations allow for increased visibility of each patient, and call lights make it easier to reach a caregiver when needed.

“We literally had bells in the old ED,” says Sarah Drew, director of Emergency & Trauma Services at Vail Health. “You used to have to ring a bell to get someone.” The new Ascom call light system provides a more effective and efficient way for you to ask for help.

After you’re taken into a room, you’re met by—at minimum—a nurse and an EMT. At this point, the medical professionals will “triage” you



Vail Health’s Emergency Department partners with Eagle County Paramedic Services for the safe transport of patients to and from the hospital in Vail.

to determine the degree of urgency of wounds or illnesses to decide the order of treatment. This allows the nurse and EMT to ensure that your most critical needs are addressed first to deliver the best possible outcome.

If you’re injured while skiing or snowboarding, Vail Health will store your equipment in designated ski lockers until discharge. “It’s just one less thing for patients to worry about,” Drew says.

IMAGING

If X-rays are needed, then you’ll stay on the gurney and be wheeled to the new imaging department just steps away, or a nurse will come in with a portable X-ray to get the films needed.

A CAT scan can be used for a wide variety of imaging needs, including stroke alerts. In addition, if a patient has suffered blunt force trauma from a motor vehicle collision or a crash into a tree on skis or a mountain bike, for instance, this scanner will most certainly be used to capture images of the cervical spine, chest, abdomen and pelvis. When the hospital is notified by EMS that this sort of injury has occurred, or a stroke alert is initiated, the CAT scan is held until that patient’s imaging is complete.



✚ WHAT IS A LEVEL III TRAUMA CENTER?



In the United States, trauma centers are identified by a designation (Level I, II, III, IV or V) that refers to the resources available and the number of patients admitted yearly.

As a Level III trauma center, Vail Health has demonstrated:

- 1) 24-hour immediate coverage by emergency medicine physicians and the prompt availability of general surgeons, orthopaedics and anesthesiologists;
- 2) A comprehensive quality assessment program;
- 3) Transfer agreements for patients requiring more comprehensive care at a Level I or Level II Trauma Center;
- 4) Back-up care for rural and community hospitals;
- 5) Continued education of the nursing and allied health personnel or the trauma team;
- 6) Injury prevention efforts and an active outreach program for its referring communities.



Vail Health's Intensive and Patient Care Units care for patients who are not stable enough to be cared for at home.

Vail Health's state-of-the-art, life-saving Cardiac Catheterization Lab allows physicians to visualize the heart's structures to identify and treat problems and abnormalities such as blocked arteries and arrhythmias.



HELIPAD

When designing the new hospital for the community, Vail Health made building an on-site helipad a priority. Vail Health Hospital is a Level III trauma center, but there are circumstances in which a higher level of care is needed. Strokes, internal organ injury and multi-system traumas are best handled by health care systems that Vail Health has developed relationships with and transports patients to via helicopter or ambulance. The new rooftop helipad, located just an elevator ride above the Emergency Department, allows the care team to transport patients more quickly and safely than the previous model, which was located adjacent to the hospital on South Frontage Road. The new helipad has decreased transport times by at least 30 minutes and has also decreased risk to the patient because it has eliminated the need for the patient to be moved from the hospital to an ambulance for transport to the helipad. Though weather can impact a helicopter's ability to fly, Drew says the

helicopter pilots love the new helipad as they feel it's safer for both them and the patients.

"We're very proud of the care that we've provided for many years," says Drew. "However, now that our facility is state-of-the-art, it matches the excellent care that we have always strived to provide. What's really cool about us having this new facility is we feel like it's finally matching what we're really able to do for our patients."

CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION LAB

Patients experiencing a cardiac incident would likely be treated in Vail Health's Cardiac Catheterization Lab, better known as the "Cath Lab."

"To put it in layman's terms, we do plumbing and we do electricity," explains Jeremiah Sawdon, Cath Lab supervisor. "The plumbing relates to





fixing blocked arteries; the electricity is the electrophysiology piece.”

The Cath Lab allows Vail Health’s cardiac specialists to visualize the heart’s structures to identify and treat problems and abnormalities such as blocked arteries and arrhythmias. “Once we see that blocked-off artery, then we go in and fix it,” explains Sawdon. This may include deploying a stent to address the artery blockage.

Sometimes, the structure of the heart is just fine but the electrical pulses that cause the valves in the heart to open and close are out of sync. In the Cath Lab, the team can perform cardioversion (shocking the heart back into a regular rhythm) as well as cryoablation—freezing a portion of the heart to stop electrical conductivity to certain nodes in the heart. Pacemakers are another solution for electrophysiological problems and the Cath Lab team can implant, exchange and upgrade pacemakers, saving patients a trip to Denver.

In addition to these procedures, the Cath Lab is also utilized when patients with cardiac history are scheduled for other procedures in order to ensure all elements of a patient’s health are addressed before surgery. Vail Health’s Cath Lab is the only one between Denver and Glenwood Springs.

“As healthy as we are up here in Vail, we get patients that were just biking 20 miles a day and had no indications that they would have any cardiac history,” Sawdon says. “We also get a lot of people traveling that find themselves in predicaments because of altitude—their heart is not used to this kind of oxygen demand.”

ICU & PCU

Patients who are unstable or potentially unstable are considered “critically ill” and require a higher level of care that Vail Health’s Intensive Care Unit (ICU) provides. For instance, ED or Cath Lab patients requiring further care will be transported to the ICU.

With five single, private rooms, patients in the ICU receive even more personalized attention. They’re greeted by their nurse, given a head-to-toe assessment and then are hooked up to systems to monitor vital signs: heart rate and rhythm, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, etc. The ICU nurses work with the rest of the interdisciplinary team to ensure that patients receive the individualized care they need.

Stable patients who aren’t yet ready to return home are cared for in the Patient Care Unit (PCU). With 38 beds, the PCU includes a combination of private and semi-private rooms. Each patient is assigned a hospitalist, a medical doctor who specializes in the care of hospitalized patients. Vail Health’s hospitalists coordinate and ensure continuity of care for patients from admission to discharge, 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. Patients on the PCU also receive the support of a care team, who can help them with the activities of daily living: getting up for a walk, attending to personal hygiene, taking vital signs, assisting with meals, etc.

“Between the ICU and PCU, patients and their loved ones can be assured they are getting the most appropriate level of care for their needs,” explains Molly English, manager of the Patient and Intensive Care Units at Vail Health.

To complement and support the clinical teams on the PCU and ICU, patients are also cared for by a variety of additional departments within the health care system, including dietary services, who provide healthy meals catered to each patient’s needs and interests; physical and occupational therapy by Howard Head Sports Medicine to help patients transition safely out of the hospital; case management, which assists with discharge planning, making sure patients and their families have the resources they need as they leave the hospital; chaplains who are available 24/7 to address patients’ spiritual and behavioral health needs; and environmental services to keep the patients’ rooms sanitized and tidy.

“Comfort care” menus are available on both the ICU and PCU floors, offering patients a variety of amenities to make their stay more comfortable. Menu items include aromatherapy, eye masks, ear buds, personal hygiene products and special gowns and robes in case the patient is cleared to walk the hallways.

None of us want to find ourselves or a loved one in the hospital for an illness or injury. However, if an emergency strikes, it’s helpful to know there’s a sophisticated health care system and knowledgeable, dedicated teams to ensure you have the best “bad day” possible. **V**

The hospital’s new on-site helipad expedites transport time when minutes matter most.

