

## NHS AMBULANCE SERVICE REST & MEAL BREAKS

### **Rest and meal breaks for ambulance staff**

*The following information has been produced by the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives to help patients and the public understand how busy NHS ambulance services are working hard to ensure their staff get the short breaks they need during their shifts, without contributing to delays in reaching the most seriously ill patients.*

Ambulance clinicians who treat patients on a daily basis typically work between eight and 12 hour shifts in often tough, mentally and physically challenging situations. In some cases hospital handover delays and high demand for ambulance services can see crews working over 12 hours, which makes the rest break even more important. The law (via the Working Time Directive) is clear that ambulance staff need to have rest breaks or meal breaks, typically between 15 and 45 minutes in length, something which NHS ambulance services and staff representatives fully support.

It is important that ambulance clinicians get these breaks during their shifts to ensure they stay healthy and keep themselves nourished and hydrated so that they are able to provide a safe service to the public. Tired staff are more likely to make mistakes so it is especially important that those treating patients are at the top of their game and arrive to treat their patient fit and ready to provide first class care.

The big challenge for NHS ambulance services and commissioners is ensuring that patients get the immediate emergency care they require while staff also get the breaks they need.

All NHS ambulance services will always prioritise the nearest available resource to an immediately life threatened patient. However, with demand for ambulance services continuing to grow there are inevitably occasions where demand outstrips available ambulances, which is the main issue managers and commissioners are working hard to try and overcome.

That said, it is important to remember that ambulance staff work extremely hard and by the nature of their job, they are caring people who are committed to providing excellent patient care. This is why in the huge majority of cases ambulance crews will voluntarily stop their breaks in order to get to immediately life threatened patients quickly.

All ambulance services have arrangements in place to enable clinicians to be interrupted during their breaks in the event of a major incident and all services have additional arrangements for crews to be disturbed during a break on a voluntary basis to respond to potentially life-threatening calls. **{ENDS}**