

Remote Medical Extraction Backgrounder/Q&A

Questions and Answers

Remote medical extraction

Q) What is remote medical extraction?

- A) It is the mobilization and transport of patients from remote areas outside of community boundaries and away from highways using helicopter or fixed-wing air ambulance when the information about the patient's injury and location are known.

It is distinct and separate from search and rescue where the location of the person is not known.

Q) How does remote medical extraction work?

- A) If you are injured or need medical attention within in the Northwest Territories during daylight hours, and cannot get to the nearest health facility, but have an exact location, such as GPS coordinates, you can call the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for assistance.

Remote medical extraction is not a general search and rescue operation. If you do not have an exact location, or the sun has set, a remote medical extraction may not be conducted until an exact location has been ascertained or until the next day.

The RCMP will assess need and initiate either search and rescue action, or a Med-Response request to see if the air ambulance can be arranged to get you to the appropriate health facility.

Each remote medical extraction is evaluated and considered on a case by case basis by Med-Response staff. There must be aircraft and medics available before a remote medical extraction will be considered.

If the air ambulance is dispatched, the pilot may talk directly with you or the individual providing the GPS coordinates, as the pilot may have further questions about the location requiring clarification.

Q) Who pays for remote medical extraction?

- A) You, as the patient, are responsible for the full cost of the remote medical extraction. This cost could be several thousand dollars.

If you are eligible for Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB), the cost of the remote medical extraction may be paid for by that program. If you have insurance

benefits from your employer or privately with a commercial insurance agency, the insurer may pay for the cost of the remote medical extraction.

It is up to you, as the patient, to work with NIHB or the insurance company to get the cost paid for.

This is not unique to the Northwest Territories. There is a charge for air ambulance trips in every other province in Canada as well.

Q) Does the GNWT cover costs associated with medical extractions?

A) No. Remote medical Extractions are not covered by the Northwest Territories Health Care Plan. The patient is responsible for the full cost of the remote medical extraction.

Q) Is a remote medical extraction considered medical travel?

A) No. Medical travel is travel from health facility to health facility that is scheduled in advance through the Stanton Territorial Health Authority Medical Travel Office and medical travel representatives in the health and social services authorities.

Medical travel is not arranged for purposes of responding to a remote medical extraction or other accident.

Q) Who is responsible for providing remote medical extractions?

A) Until late 2015, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police filled a gap in services in the Northwest Territories by arranging remote medical extractions on an *ad hoc* basis. But the mandate of the RCMP does not include the provision of these extractions.

The Department of Justice has the Territorial Police Services Agreement with the RCMP. Remote Medical Rescue is not included in the Agreement as a service offered.

With Med-Response up and running, the Government of the Northwest Territories has extended the air ambulance contract with ACCESS to fill this need using its Med-Response service.

The Department of Health and Social Services, Stanton Territorial Health Authority, the Department of Justice and the RCMP are working together to ensure coordination and provision of remote medical extractions using the Med-Response service.

Q) **Is remote medical extraction available to visitors located at fishing lodges or exploration camps in the NWT?**

A) Yes, however; patients are responsible for the full cost of the remote medical extraction. It is recommended that lodge or camp operators incorporate established protocols into their current emergency plans and advise visitors of the availability and cost implications associated with such services should they be called upon.

Search and Rescue

Q) **Who is responsible for search-and-rescue?**

A) The RCMP has the lead responsibility for ground search-and-rescue in the NWT. They are also responsible for searches conducted on fresh water throughout the NWT, including the Mackenzie River, Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake.

The Canadian Forces assumes the lead responsibility for marine search-and-rescue and for search-and-rescue operations related to downed or missing aircraft outside the boundaries of a community or airport.

Most searches for missing persons involve aircraft, which are successful in locating the missing person most of the time. Ground search teams often supplement the aerial search.

RCMP search managers first consider using trained search-and-rescue units within the community, such as Coast Guard Auxiliary and local search-and-rescue organizations. In the absence of a trained search-and-rescue team, local search teams of untrained community volunteers can be used.

Q) **Who pays for search-and-rescue?**

A) The organization conducting the search-and-rescue operation covers the costs.

Q) **Do community governments play a role in rescue?**

A) Several community-based municipal first response agencies provide ambulance and rescue services outside municipal boundaries along NWT highways. These agencies may be called to provide medical and/or rescue assistance for events involving motor vehicle accidents. Medical extraction will only be considered under such circumstances after a patient is transported to a health facility.

Q) If I need medical assistance at a remote location, can I call 9-1-1?

A) There is no 9-1-1 service in the NWT at this time. However, it is common for most modern personal locator beacons to include 9-1-1 functionality (e.g. SPOT). When the 9-1-1 feature is activated, the unit sends a distress call to a pre-determined contact identified by the user. It is recommended that primary contacts be fully briefed about how to access medical assistance at remote locations should it ever become necessary.

Med-Response

Q) What is Med-Response?

A) Med-Response provides:

- 1) Air ambulance dispatch and coordination; and
- 2) Clinicians with an immediate connection with the required medical expertise, whether that is a Nurse Practitioner, ER physician, NWT specialist, or a specialist from Alberta.

Med-Response is unique in Canada. Other jurisdictions have one or both of these services but not combined.

Med-Response is an internal referral service for NWT health and social services system clinical staff and is not a public help line.

Q) Where is Med-Response located?

A) Med-Response is located in the Stanton Territorial Hospital and is available 24 hours, 7 days per week.

It is supervised by a Nurse Practitioner, and staffed with Emergency Medical Dispatchers and Emergency Medical Coordinators (i.e., the Emergency Medical Coordinators are Registered Nurses).