

Ambulance service changes in Wairarapa from 1 July 2010

Questions and Answers

Q. What ambulance services currently operate in Wairarapa?

A. There are two separate ambulance services – the DHB-owned and operated Wairarapa Ambulance Service and the Order of St John service.

Q. What cover does the Wairarapa Ambulance Service currently provide?

A. The Wairarapa Ambulance Service provides emergency response to accidents and medical cases in Wairarapa 24/7, 365 days a year from the Masterton and Greytown Ambulance Stations. It covers all of Wairarapa during the day and night. It also provides support for St John crews rostered on at night in other Southern Wairarapa towns.

Q. What cover does the Order of St John currently provide?

A. St John is contracted by the DHB to provide ambulance cover at night (6pm to 6am) in Southern Wairarapa from Carterton, Martinborough and Featherston, 15 nights per station per month. St John provides ambulance officers and drivers for these shifts and calls upon Wairarapa Ambulance paramedics when required for advanced skills and treatments.

Q. How are the ambulances crewed?

A. DHB frontline ambulances are always crewed by two people – a full-time paramedic trained to Advanced or Intermediate level and a trained auxiliary (volunteer) officer at night and two paramedics during the day. Paramedics are trained to provide a wide range of treatments to patients with medical problems or accident-related injuries. These include advanced resuscitation, cardiac care, and the administration of a variety of drugs which aim to improve the patient's condition.

St John ambulances are crewed by ambulance officers and drivers.

Q. How many calls are attended in Southern Wairarapa during the night?

A. In the month of March 2010 (which is an average month), a total of 35 patients were attended in Carterton, Featherston and Martinborough during the night. St John attended 24 of these and received support from the DHB paramedics for 11 of them. An additional 11 patients were attended by the Wairarapa Ambulance Service alone.

Q. Why is the DHB not renewing its contract with St John for after hours cover in Southern Wairarapa?

A. Recent increases in full-time and volunteer staff numbers in the Wairarapa Ambulance Service have enabled the DHB to provide a fully-crewed ambulance from Greytown every night. The Wairarapa Ambulance Service is able to meet sector standard response times in Southern Wairarapa day and night, with a crew stationed at Greytown.

Q. What changes will Southern Wairarapa people experience?

A. As of 1 July 2010, during the night patients in Southern Wairarapa will be attended by a Wairarapa Ambulance Service ambulance and crew instead of a St John Ambulance and crew. This means a paramedic will immediately respond. Response times will remain the same or improve.

Q. Will there be enough ambulances to respond to calls during the night from 1 July?

A. Yes. The same number of ambulances that are on during the day will also be available at night. Currently the DHB ambulances which respond from Masterton and Greytown stations during the day are able to cope with the volume of calls that occur in Wairarapa. Maintaining the same number of ambulances during the night will be more than sufficient to cope with the workload as call volumes drop by 30% (on average) at night.

Q. Will response times be affected from 1 July?

A. No. A number of factors influence the time that it takes for an ambulance to reach a patient. The initial factor is the time that it takes for the ambulance crew to reach the ambulance once the crew has been alerted. In Greytown the ambulance crew sleeps on station at night and is able to respond to a 111 call out within seconds of receiving the call. In other Southern Wairarapa towns, St John crews respond from home which can cause a 4 – 5 minute delay.

Modelling suggests that response times will improve. For the calendar year 2009 the response time requirements were met during the day shift, but were not met at night.

Q. What are the national guidelines for response times?

A. The targets for emergencies (Category A) are:

Urban Area	Population > 15,000 (Masterton)	8 minutes from assignment
Rural Area	Population < 15,000 (Southern Wairarapa towns)	12 minutes from assignment
Remote Rural	Very remote	25 minutes from assignment

Note: 'assignment' is the time when the ambulance crew is alerted.

Q. What about responding to emergencies in remote rural areas?

A. The most obvious factor that influences ambulance response times is the distance that must be travelled by the ambulance to reach the patient. Response times to rural areas continue to be an issue, which is consistent with the rest of the country. When an ambulance is required in remote rural areas, the Wairarapa Ambulance Service can either ask for the volunteer fire brigade to respond in the first instance while it is on its way, or call for the Life Flight helicopter.

Q. What is the role of the Fire Service in attending emergencies and will this change?

A. The Fire Service is often the first response in remote rural areas. All fire fighters are trained in First Response Basic Life Support, and are able to look after a variety of medical and trauma patients until paramedics arrive. This level of support has been offered by the NZ Fire Service since 2006 and will continue indefinitely as it has proved itself able to improve the outcomes for patients. There will be no change to the role of the Fire Service.

Q. Will the Wairarapa Ambulance Service be capable of responding to mass casualties, without ambulances stationed in Featherston, Carterton and Martinborough?

A. The National Ambulance Plan provides guidelines and process for all ambulance providers to assist each other when required for large scale emergencies. We would look for the support of Wellington Free Ambulance and St John, just as they would be able to seek support from us should there be a mass casualty in their regions.

Q. What will happen when, for example, flooding closes the Waihenga Bridge into Martinborough?

A. The same as what currently happens during the day. The Fire Service responds first, supported by the Life Flight Helicopter if required. Weather permitting; a helicopter is the first choice.

Q. Will St John still have a role in the community?

A. St John will continue to play an important role within the community. There is no doubt that St John offers excellent youth programmes and first aid training. These programmes are supported by the Wairarapa DHB and will continue.

St John will also continue to provide first aid capabilities at all the major events in the Wairarapa and will continue to call on the Wairarapa Ambulance Service for further medical intervention and transportation.

Q. Is there still a place for St John ambulance volunteers in attending callouts?

A. Yes. The DHB wants to further enhance and develop its auxiliary (volunteer) workforce. More volunteers are also welcome. The DHB has invited the St John volunteers to join the Wairarapa Ambulance Service subject to their level of competence being assessed, and training undertaken if required.

Q. How many people volunteer for ambulance services in Wairarapa?

A. The Wairarapa Ambulance Service has 17 volunteers with 4 more in the induction phase. St John has 12 volunteers. Eight people do volunteer shifts for both services.

Q. Will people still have to pay the part-charge for ambulance services?

A. The Wairarapa DHB sends an invoice, as a part payment, to all Wairarapa patients who are attended by an ambulance for a medical complaint. Currently this charge of \$40 + GST, is one of the lowest in New Zealand.

When an accident occurs, the costs are covered by ACC under strict guidelines.

The DHB Board aspires to provide a free ambulance service for Wairarapa residents.

Q. What will happen to people who have St John Lifelink Medical Alarms?

A. The St John community alarms programme will remain unchanged. Ambulances from the Wairarapa Ambulance Service will continue to respond to alarm activations just as they do today.

Q. Where can I find more information about the national strategy for ambulance services in New Zealand?

A. NASO (National Ambulance Sector Office) website www.naso.govt.nz. NASO is a joint venture between ACC and the Ministry of Health (MOH).