



# City of Bellevue Fire Department

## Basic Life Support Transport User Fee

### *Frequently Asked Questions*



If you have a question about a transport bill, please call our billing service:

Systems Design

(800) 238-9398 or (360) 394-7010

Fax: (360) 697-1659 or email: [bellevuefd@emspatient.com](mailto:bellevuefd@emspatient.com)

#### **Is there a charge for transport services by the Bellevue Fire Department to a medical facility or hospital?**

Yes, patients transported by Basic Life Support (BLS) units within the communities of Bellevue, Beaux Arts, Clyde Hill, Hunts Point, Medina, Newcastle, Yarrow Point and unincorporated King County serviced by the Bellevue Fire Department will be charged for transport whether transported by Bellevue Fire or a private ambulance company.

#### **When did the BLS transport fee begin?**

The fee was adopted by the Bellevue City Council on December 12th, 2011 and became effective on February 1st, 2012. It was updated by the Council on December 14th, 2020 and became effective on January 1st, 2021.

#### **What is the BLS transport User Fee?**

The current fee is \$950 plus a fee of \$15 per mile transported.

#### **Why was a BLS Transport User Fee implemented?**

To help cover the costs associated with providing transport services to the community and to ensure that patients in non-life threatening situations receive equal treatment.

#### **What services are supported by the King County Medic One/EMS levy?**

The King County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system is widely hailed as one of if not the best in the world. The EMS system is "tiered" and involves both BLS service delivered by Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) and when necessary Advanced Life Support (ALS) service delivered by paramedics. The King County Medic One/EMS levy is a renewable six-year levy (currently 2008–2013) that supports 100% of the paramedics throughout the County. Seriously ill or injured patients that are transported by paramedic (ALS) units will not be billed. The BLS transport fee represents only a portion of the total cost of providing BLS transport.

#### **Do Bellevue and Fire Contract Community (Beaux Arts, Clyde Hill, Hunts Point, Medina, Newcastle, Yarrow Point ) residents receive any special benefits?**

Yes, residents of Bellevue and our Fire Contract Communities are eligible to have co-pays and deductibles waived.

#### **Are there other cities in King County that charge fee for transport?**

Yes, Redmond is the only remaining large city in King County that has not implemented a fee for transports. It is estimated that approximately eighty (80) percent of public EMS providers in the nation charge transport fees.

**Is the ability to pay a pre-condition for calling 9-1-1, receiving emergency care, or being transported by Fire Department personnel to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient's condition?**

No. The ability to pay for any emergency medical service is not a pre-condition for service. Transport by Fire Department personnel is the only service that triggers the transport fee.

**Can a patient refuse transport by Fire Department personnel?**

Yes. Patients that refuse are asked to sign a Refusal of Treatment and/or Transportation Form. When a patient is mentally impaired and/or poses a threat to themselves or others, law enforcement becomes involved and may place the person in protective custody, which may involve transport to the closest, appropriate medical facility for the patient's condition.

**What is meant by "medically necessary?"**

Medically necessary means the health care services or supplies a health care provider exercising prudent judgment would provide to a person for the purpose of assessing, evaluating, diagnosing and/or treating an illness, injury or disease or its symptoms that are: In accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice; Clinically appropriate in terms of type, frequency, extent, site and duration, and considered effective for the person's illness, injury or disease; and Not primarily for the convenience of the person, physician, or other health care provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services, or supply at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of the person's illness, injury or disease.

**Will a patient receive a bill from the City if they are not transported by the Fire Department?**

No. Patients that are medically evaluated but not transported by Fire Department personnel do not receive a bill for the services provided at the emergency scene.

**Who is responsible for paying for EMS transport?**

The patient transported. In most cases, however, the transported patient's insurance company(s) – Medicaid, Medicare, and most other private insurance policies (health, auto, and/or homeowners) – will pay all or part of the charge.

**Are patients asked to sign a form at the time of service?**

Yes. Patients are asked to complete and sign the City of Bellevue Fire Department BLS Transport Authorization Form which includes:

1. A Release authorizing the patient's insurance company(s) to be billed (Section I – Patient Signature), or a release signed by the patient's authorized representative if the patient is physically or mentally incapable of signing (Section II - Authorized Representative Signature).
2. Verification that the patient received the legally required Bellevue Fire Department Notice of Privacy Practices.

**What if a person refuses to sign anything but wants to be transported or needs to be medically transported immediately?**

The patient will be transported immediately. The ability to pay is never a condition of service; however, in order to maintain a fair and equitable system for all users and the taxpayers, the transported patient will receive a bill.

**What if the patient is not able to provide the information at that time?**

Emergency personnel will attempt to get the information at the hospital, or the patient will be asked by Systems Design to provide the billing information at a later date. Patients can contact Systems Design at the phone numbers listed on the first and last pages of the FAQ

**What if a patient transported does not have health insurance, or cannot afford to pay for the service?**

The ability to pay is never a condition of service; however, in order to maintain a fair and equitable system for all users and the taxpayers, the City will make every effort to accommodate those who wish to pay out of pocket, on an installment plan, or apply for relief through the Financial Assistance Policy. Many auto and homeowner insurance policies provide some form of medical coverage. Patients should review their various insurance policies to verify the limits of coverage under each policy.

**Does the City have a financial assistance policy?**

Yes. Financial assistance – also known as a charity policy, indigent policy, and/or debt forgiveness policy – information is available at the Fire Department ([www.bellevuewa.gov/fire](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/fire)) website or on Systems Design website at ([www.systemsdesignems.com](http://www.systemsdesignems.com)).

**What if the insurance company refuses to cover the transport user fee?**

Systems Design will help the patient demonstrate to the insurance company(s) that the transport was a medical necessity. Ultimately, however, the patient is responsible for the bill.

**Who is responsible for determining if a patient qualifies for financial assistance?**

After Systems Design receives the application and assembles pertinent information, Fire Department representatives determine if the applicant qualifies. The financial assistance policy is modeled on those used by local area hospitals to include Federal Poverty Guidelines updated annually. Financial assistance may take several forms – payment plan, adjusted balance, or debt forgiveness. The City recognizes that some people may have no financial means to pay an EMS transport fee and may also lack the social network and/or family necessary to help them complete paperwork required to apply for financial assistance. With this limited population in mind, the City realizes there may be individual cases where no financial assistance application is completed. When this situation occurs, the EMS transport fee may be written off and considered uncollectible.

**Is there a finance charge associated with EMS transport user fee bills?**

No.

**Will unpaid EMS transport bills be turned over to the City collection agency?**

Unpaid transport bills will be forwarded the City by the billing agent. The decision to forward an unpaid bill to collections is made by the Finance Director and Fire Department representatives on a case-by-case basis.

**Do EMS transport user fees cause health insurance premiums to increase?**

Nationally, EMS transport costs represent less than one percent of health-care expenditures. Other local governments that have implemented a revenue-recovery program for transport fees have reported no evidence that EMS billing increases health insurance premiums. Health insurance premiums continue to rise regardless of whether or not a community bills for EMS transports. Prescription-drug coverage, litigation, medical technology improvements, and depressed insurance company investment returns result in escalating health insurance premium costs.

**Who does a patient call with questions about billing, insurance coverage, or to receive a financial assistance policy application?**

Systems Design

PO Box 3510

Silverdale WA 98383-3510

(800) 238-9398 or (360) 394-7010

Fax: (360) 697-1659 or email: [bellevuefd@emspatient.com](mailto:bellevuefd@emspatient.com)

Web Site: <http://www.emspatient.com/bellevuefd/>

**Do you want to contact the Bellevue Fire Department?**

Billing Program Support: Nuri Thobani

(425) 452-7673 [nthobani@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:nthobani@bellevuewa.gov)

EMS Program Commander: Battalion Chief Mark Moulton

(425) 452-6982 [mmoulton@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:mmoulton@bellevuewa.gov)