



— Alcohol and Other Drug Use —  
**Situations Requiring Immediate Medical Attention**

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With alcohol or drug use there are situations when medical care or medical assessment is needed. Some are life-threatening emergencies. Others while not immediately as critical still require medical assessment and intervention to avoid serious problems.

### **Recognized Medical Emergencies**

Many emergencies are clearly recognizable.

*If the client needs life support.* Evidenced by shallow, uneven breathing; rapid pulse; or fluctuating levels of consciousness.

*If there is a threat of danger to others or harm to self.*

In these cases, use emergency transportation, police, or rescue squads.

When an individual is transported for emergency care — inform the emergency department of the patient's imminent arrival. Any information that can be provided to emergency staff is helpful, including current status; names of family or friends who may be with the patient and can provide information; diagnostic impressions; and any known relevant past medical history.

### **Need for Immediate Medical Evaluation**

Sometimes the situation may not be immediately life threatening. But prompt medical attention can be important to avoid serious problems.

The following are some situations when medical evaluation is important —

- The individual has taken drugs/alcohol that may represent toxic levels, or lead to poisoning, or cause organ damage. Medical attention is important even if the individual has no symptoms at the moment.
- Use of unknown substances and unknown amounts taken.
- Hallucinations
- Marked paranoia
- Confusion or delirium
- Severe agitation, and efforts to quiet the person are unsuccessful
- Severe shaking or tremors
- Rapid heart beat. (Rate of 110 per minute).
- Fever. (38.0° C or 100.5° F)
- Evidence of injury, especially head trauma
- Whenever an individual is semi-conscious.  
Able to be aroused the person briefly, but the person falls asleep again as soon as the stimulus is stopped.