

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Helicopter EMS in Manitoba

Why does Manitoba have a helicopter emergency medical services (EMS) program?

During the floods of 2009 and 2011, Manitoba contracted Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) to provide specialized emergency medical services via helicopter. Based on this experience, Manitoba decided to implement a permanent helicopter ambulance program with STARS.

What are the advantages of a helicopter EMS program?

Time is often a critical factor in an emergency situation where someone has been injured or suffered a life-threatening health issue such as a heart attack or stroke. The sooner patients receive specialized care, the better chance they have of surviving and recovering with fewer medical complications. Rapid transportation is essential in these situations. A helicopter EMS system takes the care to the patient, providing ongoing pre-hospital care. It is estimated the addition of helicopter EMS will save at least 35 to 50 lives per year. In addition to helping ensure the best possible outcomes for individual patients, helicopter air ambulance also offers benefits to the health-care system as a whole.

How does someone contact STARS for help?

The STARS helicopter and medical crew are dispatched the same way as other emergency medical services. When the public calls 911, a central dispatch will take information about the emergency and send the closest, most appropriate emergency service to respond.

How long does it take for the helicopter to respond?

Once STARS has been dispatched, the helicopter and crew are typically airborne within minutes. The crew is able to provide critical care to the patient on-site and during transport. The helicopter will fly to the most appropriate medical facility to provide further treatment, usually in Winnipeg.

What is the reach of the STARS helicopter?

A STARS helicopter holds enough fuel on board for a 500 kilometre return trip, which is about two hours in the air. When the helicopter has to go beyond its 500 km limit, the crew uses fuel stored in different communities across the province.

How often is the EMS helicopter dispatched?

Since STARS has been operating full-time in Manitoba, they respond to an average of one emergency per day, but this may increase as service becomes more integrated.

Who is on the crew of a STARS helicopter?

The crew includes two pilots, a critical care nurse and a critical care paramedic. An emergency physician trained in pre-hospital care and transportation is also available by telephone for every emergency response and travels in the helicopter whenever medically necessary. STARS also has its own maintenance engineers who are responsible for the safety and operations of the helicopter.

How will STARS fit in with Manitoba's EMS system?

STARS and Manitoba's air and land ambulance fleet will work together to provide seamless emergency care to Manitobans. Helicopter air ambulance will now be another option when responding to an emergency and will be used with other emergency services and health-care providers whenever the medical need and conditions are appropriate. Patient care and safety continues to be the priority for EMS in Manitoba.

How long has STARS been providing specialized EMS services?

STARS is a charitable, non-profit organization that provides rapid and specialized emergency medical helicopter transport for critically ill and injured patients. STARS has been operating since 1985 and has responded to over 21,000 calls from Calgary, Edmonton and Grande Prairie. Starting in the spring of 2012, STARS is also expanding to provide service in Saskatchewan.

How much will the STARS program cost in Manitoba?

STARS operates on a shared funding model, where costs are paid through community fundraising, individual donors, corporate supporters and government. The total budget to operate STARS in Manitoba is expected to be approximately \$10 million per year. These costs include the helicopter, maintenance, training and other operational costs. Manitoba is committed to making other significant and strategic investments in infrastructure to support the helicopter EMS program including the construction of a helipad at Health Sciences Centre.

For more information about STARS, go to www.stars.ca.