Helicopter Utilization Guidelines

POLICY

THE RULE

1. Requests for an aircraft are made through the dispatch center
2. Request as early as possible — it may be made while the ground ambulance is still responding, on first-responder information
3. Once a helicopter is enroute, only responding Mercy EMS co-workers can cancel the request; cancel promptly if it isn't needed
4. The pilot makes the final decision to accept a mission — weather and safety are the pilot's call
5. Helicopter requests are reviewed by the EMS Manager or Field Supervisor with the QA program

WHY IT EXISTS

Air transport gives critically ill or injured patients expedient care and transport — this policy keeps that resource properly utilized (Policy 2-17)

DOCUMENT IT

- Request, acceptance, and any cancellation go through dispatch and are recorded
- Be ready to justify the request — utilization is QA-reviewed

APPLIES WHEN

- Medical or trauma guideline elements are met, as assessed by the paramedic
- Ground resources are exhausted or exceeded, or prolonged extrication is expected
- Extreme heat or cold may affect outcome, or road/bridge conditions prevent ground transport
- Do the time math: ~6 minutes to lift-off by day, 10 by night, then ~2 miles per minute of flight — if ground is faster and speed is the only reason, go by ground
- A safe landing zone can be prepared, and weather allows safe flight

EXCEPTIONS & EDGE CASES

- Weather stops the closest aircraft: dispatch may request one from another area with acceptable weather
- Patient or family belongs to another flight program: contact Saint John's EMS Dispatch and compare ETAs — never let membership delay care

Take Home Message:

Request early through dispatch, cancel honestly if it isn't needed, and let the pilot own the weather decision.