

# Calling 9-1-1

## What you need to know when calling from a cell phone

### Did you know over 80% of calls to 9-1-1 are made from cell phones?

While cell phones can be helpful to access 9-1-1 services, they have limitations. Therefore, it is critical to know what to do if a cell phone call to 9-1-1 fails.

#### Know the risk

Be aware that your call can fail when making a 9-1-1 call from your cell phone with poor reception or no reception.

#### Device signal and reception

#### Common causes of poor reception or call failure

Any call made to 9-1-1 using a cell phone can be affected by the signal strength, also referred as coverage or reception, in your location. Visual icons on your device, such as bar indicators, low/no signal, and no service, refer to your current signal strength. Poor reception can impact your ability to reach a 9-1-1 operator.

There are many reasons cell phone reception or signal can be weakened. It is important to be aware of what causes poor reception or call failure so that you can use another option to call 9-1-1.

Common causes of poor reception or call failures include:

- **Geography/environment:** Landscape can have a negative effect on reception. Common physical examples include forested areas, hills, mountains, and valleys.
- **Adverse weather conditions:** Poor weather conditions, such as rain, snow, wind, humidity, and snow, can affect your signal.
- **Building materials/structure:** Very large buildings and structures, especially those made with concrete, metal, brick, thick walls, few windows, etc., can affect signal.

- **Remote areas:** Isolated areas with few to no cell phone towers can reduce your coverage.

#### What to do if your call fails

If you try to call 9-1-1 using your cell phone and your call does not connect or you cannot establish communication with the operator, there are other options. These may depend on your emergency and location.

If your call fails, consider:

- **Calling from a landline:** identify the location of your closest landline and know to use it.
- **Moving locations:** moving to a different location may increase signal strength to enable a successful connection.
  - If inside a structure made of concrete or thick walls, moving outside or to another area may provide better signal strength.
  - If outside, but surrounded by physical obstructions, you may have to re-locate to an area that has fewer obstructions.

#### Know your location

Know the exact location or address of the emergency when calling. The operator may not know your precise location when calling 9-1-1 from a cell phone, as they only receive your approximate location and cell phone contact number.

The 9-1-1 operator will try to confirm your location or the location of the emergency by asking questions. If you are driving and need to relay information, pull your vehicle over to a safe location as soon as possible and look for signs or landmarks to help describe the emergency location.

For more information about 9-1-1 calls, visit [Alberta 911 program](#) and [Emergency preparedness](#)

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