

London Evening Standard

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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■ PLEA TO REVELLERS WITH MINOR INJURIES
AS AMBULANCE SERVICE STRUGGLES TO COPE

DON'T DIAL 999... TAKE A TAXI TO HOSPITAL, SAYS BORIS

Joe Murphy Political Editor

BORIS JOHNSON today issued an urgent public appeal to Christmas revellers not to dial 999 for an ambulance except in a genuine emergency.

The Mayor urged people with minor fractures or sprains to take themselves to hospital in a taxi or ask relatives to drive them. His plea follows a big increase in pressure on

the London Ambulance Service, which had its busiest week ever ending on December 14, when crews attended 11,008 Category A incidents – the most seriously ill and injured.

The head of the LAS revealed that crews have been hampered by non-emergencies – including one call-out for a cat with a broken leg and a person with a tissue stuck in his

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Cyclists lying injured for two hours 'is not good enough', says NHS chief

Ross Lydall
Health Editor

THE head of the NHS in London today said it was "not good enough" for injured cyclists to be left lying in the street for up to two hours as they waited for an ambulance.

Dr Anne Rainsberry admitted the London Ambulance Service was "struggling" due to a national shortage of paramedics, leaving it unable to

respond within target times to non-life-threatening emergencies.

Angie Cook, 63, was left lying in a road in Teddington for 90 minutes on December 1 after being knocked off her bike by a car. And last week an unnamed man was forced to wait two hours and 14 minutes for an ambulance after he fell from his bike near Regent's Park and injured his hip and back.

Dr Rainsberry, NHS England's regional director for London, said:

"People waiting too long because they have fallen off their bike is a symptom of the LAS not having enough staff. That clearly is not good enough."

She said that staff at ambulance HQ would have remained in phone contact with the cyclists after forming a "clinical judgment" that their needs were less urgent than other patients, but added: "Clearly that is not a good level of service for Londoners. I wouldn't be the first to say that." Demand on the

LAS has soared to record highs, with "category A" calls – those requiring a response within eight minutes – hitting 11,008 in the week to December 14.

The LAS, which is recruiting paramedics from Australia and New Zealand to fill more than 400 vacancies, has delivered the slowest response times in the country since September.

Of the "category A" calls in November, it got to 64.2 per cent of the most time-critical "red 1" calls – to patients who are not breathing and do not have a pulse – within eight minutes. Just 54.8 per cent of "red 2" calls – where the patient is having a stroke or fit – were reached within the target. The NHS target for both is 75 per cent.

Dr Rainsberry said: "It's struggling. I think everybody can see that. They have got very significant vacancies. There are medium-term plans to manage that, but there is no getting away from the fact that they have seen a significant number of staff leave."

"They have the highest attrition rates of any ambulance service in the coun-



NIGEL HOWARD

Ordeal: cyclist Angie Cook lay in road for 90 minutes before ambulance arrived

try. They are doing international recruitment and in January they will have a significant influx of staff. I think that will make a big, big difference.

"But we are absolutely satisfied that the sickest people are getting an eight-minute response." A LAS spokeswoman said it had nothing to say in response to Dr Rainsberry's comments.

Ambulance service 'may be stretched to breaking point'

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ear. Mr Johnson told the Standard: "The message is simple – celebrate responsibly and only call an ambulance in a genuine emergency."

City officials fear the service could be stretched to breaking point when millions of Londoners risk getting injured at alcohol-fuelled celebrations of Christmas and the New Year.

The scale of the problem was laid out when the Mayor chaired a London-wide resilience meeting attended by emergency services, Met Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe and Transport for London chief Sir Peter Hendy.

It was told emergency call-outs are already 16 per cent higher in London this month than last December.

Some ambulances were held up waiting to offload ill patients at busy accident & emergency units. At the same time, members of the public were increasingly dialling 999 for help rather than waiting to see their GP or travelling to A&E under their own steam.

Mr Johnson said: "Over the festive period and winter I know the public will heed emergency services' calls for restraint when it comes to calling an ambulance." The LAS has already in-

creased overtime and even asked for support by other regions. People with minor injuries or illnesses are being declined an ambulance and given phone advice or being referred to NHS 111.

Its director of operations Jason Killens said: "Each year demand on our service rises. December has been especially busy and the last two weeks were our busiest ever for Category A patients.

"In contrast to these life-threatening incidents, we have also had calls for an emergency ambulance on blue lights for a cat with a broken leg, a person with a tissue in his ear and a woman with period pain."

A City Hall source said: "Of course LAS don't and won't skimp on genuine emergencies. But with practical stuff like a fractured wrist or badly sprained ankle, perhaps a lift with a relative or taking a taxi to A&E rather than calling an ambulance is the answer, leaving crews to deal with serious and life-threatening issues."

Shadow health secretary Andy Burnham said: "The LAS needs more help than this from senior Tories. This is a crisis of their making and it is no good trying to blame the public."

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