

OVERDOSE & POLICE

WHAT TO EXPECT - STATE BY STATE

Over all, the issues surrounding ambulance services responding to drug overdose calls are the same in every state in Australia. Often, people are fearful of prosecution and they don't call an ambulance. This can result in unnecessary deaths, which potentially, could have been prevented if the ambulance had been called.

What we are trying to do, is expel some of the myths around ambulance services attending overdoses and tell people what to expect in every state in Australia. We have also included the information you need to provide the ambulance service call taker with, to ensure quick and effective service.

THE NUMBER TO RING IF YOU NEED AN AMBULANCE IN ANY STATE OR TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA IS:

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AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

THE POLICE WILL NOT BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN THE ACT, UNLESS:

- The Ambulance Service feels that there is a threat of violence (usually only once on the scene and even then, there are very few cases where this has happened).
- The area has been **flagged** as a dangerous area, meaning that the address is known to the Ambulance Service (eg: certain flats etc where the ambulance vehicles are being vandalised or the officers robbed or threatened). These areas will have a flag on them so that every time an ambulance is called out to those flats the police would automatically be called. However, the police would not be responding to a drug overdose call.
- The caller to the Ambulance Service specifically requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes a fatal and the person dies. (The Australian Federal Police would then utilise their investigations unit to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

NEW SOUTH WALES

THE POLICE WILL NOT BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN NSW,
UNLESS:

- There is reasonable suspicion by the Ambulance Service call taker of danger to attending ambulance officers.
- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police are required to attend if there is a death no matter what the cause.)

QUEENSLAND

THE POLICE WILL **NOT** BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN QLD,
UNLESS:

- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- There is a need for crowd control (at concerts etc) to enable ambulance officers to provide care to patient/s.
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE POLICE WILL **NOT** BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN WA,
UNLESS:

- There is reasonable suspicion by the Ambulance Service call taker of danger to attending ambulance officers.
- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

* Note: All overdoses in WA are transported to a hospital for further observation.

VICTORIA

In Victoria they have two ambulance services; one is the “Metropolitan Ambulance Service” for the inner city and “Rural Ambulance Victoria” is for the more rural areas. Both have similar policies on this issue, these are listed below.

THE POLICE WILL NOT BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN VIC, UNLESS:

- There is an actual risk to the safety of their ambulance officers.
- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

* Note: All overdoses in VIC are offered transport to the hospital, but if refused they will leave them in the care of someone else with instructions to call them out again if there's any deterioration.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

THE POLICE WILL NOT BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN SA, UNLESS:

- The Ambulance Service call taker believes that crews are being requested to attend a situation which over the telephone suggests the possibility of violence.
- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- The address has been **flagged** as a dangerous area; this is when there are certain addresses where the ambulance crews have encountered violence. These addresses are entered into a database and will have a flag on them so that every time an ambulance is called out to that address the crews would be warned and the police would automatically be called. However, they would not know that they were responding to a drug overdose, so they would not pursue any drug charges as a result of the call out.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

NORTHERN TERRITORY

THE POLICE WILL **NOT** BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN THE NT, UNLESS:

- There is an actual risk to the safety of their ambulance officers.
- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

*Note: If there are any issues with violence towards ambulance officers or anything like Child Protection issues, police would be notified but the issue would be dealt with separately (according to normal procedures).

TASMANIA

THE POLICE WILL **NOT** BE CALLED TO A DRUG OVERDOSE IN TAS, UNLESS:

- Attending staff (ambulance officers) request the police (usually only once on the scene and only if danger or threat of danger is present).
- Another party contacts them (not the ambulance service or the person calling the service).
- The person requesting the ambulance requests police presence.
- The overdose becomes fatal and the person dies. (The police will attend to establish if the death was at all suspicious.)

* Note: If evidence of other drug related activity and/or illicit drugs or injecting equipment is present Tasmanian Police can use their discretion to determine if further investigation is needed.

WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL THE CALL TAKER

- **The address of the incident**
- **The substance they've taken to overdose, eg: narcotic, benzodiazepines etc.**
- **Age and sex of the patient**
- **A call back number (if possible)**
- **Whether they are part conscious or unconscious (first aid instruction can be provided over the phone whilst waiting for the ambulance to arrive).**