

STARS in Saskatchewan FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the advantages of a helicopter EMS program?

Time is often an integral factor in an emergency when someone has been critically injured or suffered a life-threatening health issue such as a heart-attack or stroke. The sooner patients receive specialized care, the better the chance they have of surviving and recovering with fewer medical complications. Rapid transportation is essential in these situations. STARS works together with existing emergency medical service providers in the province to help ensure the best possible outcomes for patients.

How does someone contact STARS for help?

STARS is dispatched the same way as other emergency medical service providers. When the public calls 911, a central dispatch takes information about the situation and sends the most appropriate emergency service to respond. In cases where a critically ill patient is being transferred from a rural hospital to a larger hospital, it is a doctor-to-doctor decision.

How many calls has STARS completed in Saskatchewan?

To date, STARS has responded to over 400 missions in Saskatchewan. Of those patients, STARS has transported or provided care for approx 300 patients. The Regina STARS base launched service April 30, 2012 and the Saskatoon Base opened six months later on October 15. Both bases are staffed and able to provide service 24/7.

How long does it take the helicopter to respond?

Once STARS has accepted a mission request, the helicopter and crew are typically airborne within ten minutes. The STARS air medical crew is able to provide critical care to the patient on-board the aircraft during transport.

How far can a STARS helicopter travel?

The STARS helicopter has a range of approximately 500 kilometres, meaning it can reach a scene or hospital within 250 kilometers of one of our bases and return without refueling. For emergency calls that are further than that range, the STARS helicopter will touch down and gas up at fuel service sites that have been established at municipal airports and by private owners.

Can the helicopter fly at night?

Our entire STARS fleet is equipped with night vision technology. The goggles essentially turn night into day for our pilots by intensifying images so our aviators can see power lines, trees and other potential hazards when operating the aircraft at night. This technology ensures a greater level of safety for our crew, our patients and the public.

Will heliports need to be built for STARS helicopter landings?

Heliports will be built under the leadership of the Ministry of Health. Priorities have been set for rooftop heliports at the Regina General Hospital and at the future Children's Hospital of Saskatchewan at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon. The heliport in Regina is expected to be ready before the end of 2013.

Why is a rooftop heliport needed?

It's important to remember the patients STARS will be transporting to the Regina General Hospital are serious traumas and emergencies – our patients are typically facing a life threatening or critical situation so every minute counts. The heliport at Regina General Hospital will be an important step for improving access to emergency care because every second counts.

What can STARS do to mitigate helicopter noise for people who live near a heliport?

STARS has a *Fly Friendly* policy that all of our pilots abide by, which directs them to reduce our noise as much as possible when approaching and departing landing areas. Some ways that we reduce sound levels include taking flight paths around high density residential areas whenever possible, and approaching hospitals and landing zones at the highest altitude possible. Our mandate is to provide a high level of patient care while transporting critically ill and injured patients in the fastest and safest way possible, while being highly sensitive and considerate of those living in communities surrounding landing zones.

Where does the helicopter currently land with patients?

In Regina, the helicopter currently lands at the airport and is met by ground EMS to transport the patient to hospital. STARS' critical care medical crew remains with the patient until care is transferred. In Saskatoon, the STARS helicopter currently lands in an area south of College Drive, along McOrmand Drive, which will serve as a temporary landing site until the completion of the new Children's Hospital of Saskatchewan where a permanent rooftop heliport is planned. STARS lands at this private property, and is met by ground EMS to transport patients to RUH.

Can weather conditions prevent STARS from responding to a medical emergency?

There are times when severe weather conditions can limit availability of the aircraft, including severe thunderstorms, dense fog, high winds or icing (a condition where moisture in the air freezes on the body and rotor blades of a helicopter). Before any mission is accepted, STARS pilots review the weather conditions in the areas of the planned flight path. If severe weather is forecast or occurring, the flight crew might choose to wait for the conditions to pass or they might recommend the use of ground ambulance for transport of the patient.

How many crew members are required to fly a mission?

STARS crews consist of two pilots, a nurse experienced in emergency/ICU care and an advanced-care paramedic. A transport physician trained in pre-hospital care and transportation is also available by telephone for every emergency response, and is airborne in the helicopter when medically necessary. A significant level of specialized emergency or ICU care, knowledge and experience is required by our medical team and all have acquired this expertise through working in an advanced care emergency medical service or intensive care hospital environments.

How many employees work for STARS?

Between Saskatoon and Regina, there are about 90 employees including pilots, air medical crew, fundraisers and other administrative staff.

Will patients be billed for STARS?

STARS will not be involved in billing patients directly. The Government of Saskatchewan's current billing practice for airplane air ambulance services will also be applied to helicopter ambulance. Patients will be charged a \$350 fee per flight.

How will STARS be funded?

The Government of Saskatchewan has committed to an annual investment of \$10.5 million per year. The remaining funds will be raised through STARS fundraising initiatives including corporate partnerships. To date, several major donors have stepped forward with generous contributions to the Saskatchewan program including:

- Crescent Point Energy as lead donor (\$5 million)
- Mosaic Potash (\$5.5 million towards a helicopter and hangar in Regina)
- PotashCorp (funding for a hangar and an AW139 helicopter in Saskatoon; the estimated value of these assets is \$27 million)
- Crown Investments Corporation (\$10 million)
- Enbridge (\$500,000)
- Enerplus (\$300,000)
- Legacy Oil (\$250,000)
- Husky Energy (\$250,000)
- RBC Foundation (\$250,000)
- Rawico Radio (\$100,000)
- Whitecap Resources (\$25,000)

How much do the helicopters cost?

A BK117 helicopter with a fully equipped medical interior costs approximately \$5 million.

There are plans to purchase an AW139 helicopter for our Saskatoon base to help serve more of northern Saskatchewan. This helicopter can fly further and faster than the current BK117 helicopters and its purchase will be funded by PotashCorp. An AW139 helicopter with a fully equipped medical interior costs approximately \$16 million.

Why does STARS fundraise in Saskatchewan?

STARS is a charitable, non-profit organization that provides rapid and specialized emergency medical care and transportation for critically ill and injured patients. STARS operates with a community-partnered model that consists of government, community and corporate support. Funding is met through donations received from individuals, service groups, business and corporations, and through collaborative agreements with provincial governments. STARS looks forward to launching a home lottery again this spring to help raise funds for the service.

What is the fundraising money used for?

Funds raised in Saskatchewan are directed to the operation of the two Saskatchewan bases.