

Life Flight Use for Medical Emergencies on Bald Head Island

Medical emergencies on Bald Head Island require a coordinated response that differs from that in most mainland communities. Because the island is separated from the mainland by water, getting a patient to a hospital involves both medical decision-making and transportation logistics.

For most patients who need to leave the island for hospital care, Bald Head Island Public Safety transports the patient by boat to Deep Point Marina, where Brunswick County EMS meets the island crew and assumes patient care. Brunswick County EMS then transports the patient by ambulance to the appropriate hospital.

For certain critically ill or injured patients, however, Life Flight may be the most appropriate option.

Most Patients Leave the Island by Boat

Most patients requiring hospital care do not need an air medical helicopter.

Bald Head Island Public Safety responds to the emergency, evaluates the patient, and provides initial emergency care. When the patient needs to be transported to a mainland hospital, they are typically transported by boat (Ferry, Coast Guard, Sheriff's Office, Sea Tow, Towboat US) to Deep Point Marina.

At Deep Point Marina, Brunswick County EMS meets the Bald Head Island Public Safety crew and takes over patient care. The Brunswick County EMS crew then transport the patient by ambulance to the appropriate hospital.

This coordinated transfer allows Bald Head Island Public Safety to return to the island and remain available for additional emergencies while Brunswick County EMS continues the patient's care and transport to the hospital.

When Is Life Flight Used?

Life Flight is an air medical service used when a patient has a serious or life-threatening medical condition or injury, and air transport may provide a significant advantage.

The decision is based on the patient's condition, the level of medical care required, transportation time, weather, aircraft availability, and the location of the appropriate receiving hospital.

Examples of situations in which Life Flight may be considered include:

- Major traumatic injuries
- Serious head or spinal injuries
- Certain cardiac emergencies

- Suspected strokes requiring specialized treatment
- Severe respiratory emergencies
- Significant blood loss
- Other medical conditions requiring immediate access to specialized care

A serious emergency does not automatically mean that Life Flight will be used. Medical professionals evaluate each situation individually and determine the safest and most appropriate method of transportation.

Our Designated Life Flight Landing Zone

Bald Head Island has a pre-designated Life Flight landing zone on South Bald Head Wynd.

When air medical transport is requested, Bald Head Island Public Safety responds to the patient's location and begins emergency care. The patient is then transported by island ambulance to the designated landing zone on South Bald Head Wynd.

Because the landing zone is located on the roadway, Bald Head Island Public Safety shuts down traffic on South Bald Head Wynd before the helicopter arrives. The road remains closed throughout the landing, patient transfer, and departure of the aircraft.

Once the helicopter has safely departed and Public Safety determines that the area is safe to reopen, traffic restrictions are lifted.

This procedure provides the helicopter crew with a controlled landing area and helps protect residents, visitors, emergency personnel, and the flight crew.

What Happens During a Life Flight Response?

Bald Head Island Public Safety responds to the patient's location, provides emergency care, and coordinates the transportation plan with the appropriate medical resources.

If air transport is selected by the medical provider, the patient is transported by island ambulance to the designated landing zone on South Bald Head Wynd.

Before the helicopter arrives, Public Safety establishes the landing zone and closes South Bald Head Wynd to traffic. The road remains closed while the helicopter lands, the patient is transferred to the Life Flight medical crew, and the aircraft prepares for departure.

The Life Flight crew then assumes patient care and transports the patient by helicopter to the appropriate receiving hospital.

The patient is flown alone as there is limited room in the aircraft. If a parent/loved one is on-scene, the Public Safety supervisor will advise of the receiving hospital.

Where Does Life Flight Come From?

Air medical resources serving the area may be dispatched from nearby mainland locations. Two primary locations are:

- Columbus Regional Healthcare System in Whiteville, NC
- Novant Health Brunswick Novant Center in Bolivia, NC

The aircraft responding to a particular emergency can depend on availability, the patient's needs, weather and flight conditions, and other operational considerations.

Why Would Life Flight Be Chosen Instead of a Boat?

The primary consideration is the patient's medical needs and the time required to reach the appropriate level of care.

For many patients, transportation by boat to Deep Point Marina followed by transfer to Brunswick County EMS is appropriate and provides an effective route to the hospital.

For a patient who needs specialized care urgently, however, the additional steps involved in a boat transfer may make air transport preferable.

The decision may also be influenced by the patient's condition and the type of treatment needed. A patient who requires a trauma center, stroke center, cardiac care, or another specialized service may benefit from being transported directly by air rather than following the usual boat-to-mainland process.

Weather and Safety Matter

Life Flight is not simply a matter of calling a helicopter whenever an emergency occurs.

Helicopter operations depend on safe flying conditions, including weather, visibility, and other flight considerations. Aircraft and medical crews must also be available, and the flight must be appropriate for the patient's condition and destination.

If those conditions are not met, transportation by boat and ambulance may be the safest option.

Ultimately, patient care and safety determine the method of transportation.

What the Public Should Know

When Life Flight is responding to Bald Head Island, the public may see Public Safety personnel closing a portion South Bald Head Wynd east of Muscadine Wynd.

The road closure is necessary for the safe operation of the helicopter and is not simply a traffic inconvenience. Members of the public near the landing zone should not attempt to drive, walk, or operate golf carts through the closed area.

The road will remain closed until the helicopter has departed and Public Safety determines that it is safe to reopen.

Members of the public should follow all directions from Public Safety personnel and volunteers and stay clear of the landing area. Do not approach the aircraft or its crew unless specifically directed to do so.