



Helicopter/Regional Transport System Q&A for Ward I Burlington Neighbors

OVERVIEW:

Patients needing lifesaving care within our region will benefit from a new collaboration between the University of Vermont Health Network and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health. UVM Health Network has signed a contract to staff a helicopter provided by the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Advanced Response Team (DHART)'s air ambulance program. Dartmouth-Hitchcock will oversee the program, leveraging its over two decades of experience operating a premier air ambulance program in northern New England. This is the latest step in the development by UVM Health Network to create a comprehensive Regional Transport System (RTS) which will allow medical experts to better respond when minutes matter. For patients suffering from trauma, heart attack, stroke or other critical illness, time is vital. Currently, hospitals in the region rely mainly on ground ambulance service for critical care transportation between facilities, which can mean hundreds of miles of travel and a prolonged time to lifesaving care. For example, patients experiencing a heart attack or stroke can sometimes receive clot-busting drugs at a rural hospital, but time is of the essence for those who need more advanced procedures within a limited window of time in order to have the best outcome.

Where will the helicopter be based, and when will it arrive?

It will be based at Burlington Airport beginning in July.

Will it land at the East Avenue Helipad by the Rugby Field?

Yes. It will typically take off from the airport to pick up a patient at another location, such as another hospital across Lake Champlain. It will then fly to the helipad, and the patient will be transported to UVM Medical Center's Emergency Department by ambulance.

Will the helicopter fly over the houses near East Avenue?

DHART has traditionally noted the housing areas over East Ave as a place to avoid. Approaches to the landing pad are typically made into the wind from the southeast or east and housing areas around East Avenue will continue to be avoided as much as possible.

What route will the ambulance take from the helipad to UVM Medical Center's ER?

The ambulance will enter the Medical Center campus via Carrigan Drive and use Mary Fletcher Drive (the perimeter road) to reach the Emergency Department. The ambulance will typically not turn its siren on.

How many additional flights will be added per year?

We anticipate approximately 350-400 flights a year across our entire network, beyond the current 200 flights per year. Not all of those will come to Burlington, but we anticipate that neighbors can expect an average of one flight per day to land at the helipad.

What type of helicopter is it?

Our crews will be flying in an Airbus EC135P2+. This is a very safe aircraft and has some of the lowest overflight noise levels and take off levels of other comparable air ambulances.

What will be the duration of the noise interruption of the helicopter when it uses the helipad, ie. how long will it take for the helicopter to fly in, land, unload, and then take off again?

The process of landing, engine shutdown, unloading of a critical patient, startup and takeoff generally takes approximately ten minutes.

If the helicopter takes off from the airport to pick up patients, could it also land back at the airport and drive from there to the hospital using the emergency treatment team en route?

Landing on the helipad provides the shortest distance to the hospital and least amount of traffic to maneuver in a critical situation.

How safe is it to have a helipad in its current location without a secure perimeter (i.e. fenced in area)? He said he has heard concerns that the helipad is open to anyone walking by, and not in a secure area.

The helicopter does not land unannounced. When a helicopter is en route, UVM Medical Center Security goes to the helipad to make sure it is secure, that there is no debris on the pad, and that there are no people within 200 feet of the helipad. That sometimes involves asking people on the rugby field to move temporarily. We also notify UVM police and UVM rescue. Both the police and rescue buildings are located next to the helipad.

What is the hospital's plan to deal with a possible crash? Do we have a security/emergency plan?

If there were a crash, UVM Medical Center Security would call 911 and report the emergency. Fire, rescue and police would respond. UVM Medical Center Security would assist as needed. Also, both UVM Medical Center Emergency Communications Center and The Air Traffic control tower at Burlington International Airport are in contact with the helicopter. The Tower is in charge of the air space. The ambulance district has an overarching multiple casualty plan.

Who sanctions the helicopter to land and take off at the helipad? What body approves the safety of a helipad being located in a residential area?

The helipad is FAA certified. The access road to the helipad, and the helipad itself, sit on land owned by UVM that straddles the Burlington/South Burlington city line. The Burlington land is zoned "Institution"; the South Burlington land is zoned "Commercial 1 – Residential 12". This South Burlington definition combines both commercial and residential. Residential Class 12 was formed to encourage high-density residential use near shopping areas, schools, and public transportation facilities, and that are served by roads capable of carrying high traffic volumes.

UVM obtained a State Act 250 Permit for a project that included location of the helicopter pad at its current location in 1991. The current location incorporates a turn-out for safe stand-by of UVM Rescue/Police and UVM Medical Center Security. This is intended to ensure a secure site during take-off and landings. Protocols require a safe distance of 200 feet to be maintained by all personnel during takeoff and landing. This applies to all proximate activities such as the use of the adjacent rugby field. No fence was required by the 1991 Act 250 permit, which was reviewed by the FAA.