

Text-to-911: Quick Facts & FAQs

It is now possible, in Ingham County, to use a cell phone to send a text message to 911. This means if you are unable to make a voice 911 call, you can use your cell phone to text your emergency to 911. **However, if you are safely able to make a voice call to 911, you should always do that instead of texting.**

Remember do not text and drive!

Q: What is Text-to-911 and why would I want to use it?

A: It is the ability to send a "short message" (SMS) to 911. Texting during an emergency could be helpful if you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, or if a voice call to 911 might otherwise be dangerous or impossible. If you are able to make a voice call to 911, and if it is safe to do so, you should always make a voice call to 911.

If you attempt to send a text to 911 where Text-to-911 service is unavailable, you will receive a "bounce-back" message that Text-to-911 is not available and that you should contact emergency services by another means.

Q: If I am able to text-to-911, will the 911 Center automatically know my location?

A: When you text 911 from a wireless phone, the dispatcher may not know your approximate location or phone number. For this reason, if you send a text message to 911, it is important to give the 911 dispatcher an accurate address or location as quickly as possible.

Q: Why is a voice call to 911 preferred over texting?

A: You should use the texting option, only when calling 911 is not an option. Using a phone to call 911 is still the most efficient way to reach emergency help. Texting is not always instantaneous, which is critical during a life-threatening emergency. Voice calls allow the 911 dispatcher to more quickly ask questions and obtain information from the caller. Two-way communication by text takes more time and is subject to limits on the length of text messages. When you make a voice call to 911, the dispatcher will typically receive your phone number and the approximate location of your phone automatically. When calling or texting-to-911, be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 dispatcher.

Q: How do I text 911 in an emergency?

A: Enter the numbers “911” in the “To” field (dashes are not needed). The first text message should be brief and contain the ***location of the emergency***, including the city, township or village, and the type of help needed. Push the “send” button. Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 911 dispatcher. Text in simple words. Do not use abbreviations. Keep text messages brief and concise.

Q: What should I include in my text?

A: Providing location information and nature of the emergency in the first text message is imperative. Text abbreviations or slang should never be used so that the intent of the dialogue can be as clear as possible.

Q: How much information can I put in the text?

A: Texts sent to 911 have the same 160-character limit as other text messages. Do not send pictures, video, other attachments or add other recipients to the message.

Q: What if I have a non-emergency, can I still text 911?

A: The texting function should only be used for emergency situations that require an immediate response from police, fire, or emergency medical services. Non-emergency issues should still be communicated to the Ingham County 911 Center through its non-emergency line at 517-272-6026.

Q: Can all cell phones text 911?

A: You must subscribe to your wireless carrier’s text or data plan in order to make or receive text messages.

Q: Why use Text-to-911?

A: Text-to-911 is intended primarily for use in three emergency scenarios:

1. An individual who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, or has a speech disability.

2. Someone who is in a situation where it is not safe to place a voice call to 911.
 3. A medical emergency that renders the person incapable of speech.
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Q: Can I send a photo or video to 911?

A: No, pictures or videos cannot be received by 911 at this time.

Q: Can I text a family member and 911 in a group text so that I let both know of an emergency at the same time?

A: No, if you include anyone else on your text to 911, it may not be received by 911.

Q: What carriers can text 911?

A: Ingham County will accept Text-to-911 messages from AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile or Verizon.

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