

## Maine Medical Center Sisters Heliport FAQs

### **Q. Why does MMC have a heliport?**

- A. Maine Medical Center is home to Maine’s only Level 1 Trauma Center and only Pediatric Emergency Department, serving critically ill or injured patients from Maine and New Hampshire. As such, having a heliport is a vital door to the hospital for patients with time sensitive care needs coming from a distance, [where every second counts](#).

Every hospital and EMS service in the state depends on the heliport at MMC for specialty services that support the entire state, and virtually every hospital in Maine has a heliport which links all of the hospitals together for the small population of patients needing LifeFlight.

### **Q. Who are the passengers on the helicopters?**

- A. The helicopter is essentially a flying intensive care unit, and as such, carries critically ill or injured Mainers from every hospital and community from Maine and often New Hampshire. These community members of all ages are victims of accidents or have severe, life-threatening health conditions, serious disease, etc. In addition to the patients, there is a pilot and two to three specialized medical crew members.

### **Q. Is every flight a patient flight, or are there other uses of the heliport?**

- A. With the exception of extremely limited training flights, every flight is for a patient. Very rarely, a helicopter will transport a specialist physician from MMC to a distant, outlying hospital for an emergent complex patient who cannot be transported for a variety of reasons.

### **Q. How does a patient get referred or approved for an air ambulance?**

- A. Eighty-Seven percent of LifeFlight patients are critically ill or injured patients transported from another hospital to MMC, as opposed to “scene patients,” which are those brought directly to MMC from the scene of an accident. All of these transfers from other hospitals are at request of a referring physician, managed with consultation from LifeFlight physicians.

Scene patients are referred to LifeFlight by EMS and public safety first responders using [protocols from Maine EMS](#) on determining direct transfer to a specialty medical center.

### **Q. Why are there two pads?**

- A. Roughly a dozen times a month there are simultaneous patients arriving at MMC via helicopter. The two helipads allow two helicopters to use the heliport at the same time, and help reduce overflights of the neighborhood. Previously, when there was only one pad, any time a second helicopter was inbound, each aircraft would have to “juggle” – i.e., relocate to the Portland Jetport to allow room for the other helicopter, and then return to the MMC heliport to pick up their medical crew, which doubled the flights for a single patient transport.

**Q. Why is the secondary pad sometimes used when the primary pad is vacant?**

- A. The secondary pad transit to the door is shorter and more protected from weather than is the path from the primary pad. The pilots will use the secondary pad if the wind conditions on the helipad are such that it is safer for the patient and the flight crew during their transit.

**Q. What medevac services use the heliport?**

- A. LifeFlight of Maine is the primary. Other services that occasionally access the Sisters Heliport include Boston MedFlight, Dartmouth Hitchcock DHART, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Maine Army National Guard.

**Q. Why not use a ground ambulance instead of the helicopters?**

- A. Medevac helicopters are used in critical situations where every second counts for a patient's survival, and speed is of the essence. They are also used to transport seriously ill patients who must be moved quickly to Maine Medical Center for a higher level of care. In addition, in cases where time is of the essence, the distance from MMC will also factor into the decision to use a medevac helicopter rather than a ground ambulance. Roughly 40 percent of the patients LifeFlight transports to MMC come via the fixed-wing airplane and ground transport.

**Q. What are the preferred approaches to the MMC Sisters Heliport?**

- A. The preferred approaches can be seen in this diagram:



**Q. Why do pilots not always use a preferred approach?**

- A. The pilots first and foremost job is to land and take off from the helipad safely. Any deviation from the preferred approaches is for a specific safety parameter such as wind conditions, high temperatures / humidity (which impact a helicopter's engine capabilities, and so influence

approach decisions), or air traffic control instructions, due to incoming flights or other aviation considerations. When the pilots use an alternative approach they file an exception report noting the safety hazard.

LifeFlight's pilots are all trained extensively on the preferred approaches for the Sisters Heliport, and work diligently to use those approaches to minimize community impact.

**Q. What do pilots do to minimize noise to adjacent residential neighborhoods?**

A. The pilots' first and foremost job is to safely land and depart the MMC heliport. Without question the helicopters – and all aircraft – have a noise signature. The pilots are aware of the impact the sound of their aircraft have on residential areas and take steps, like following the preferred approaches, to minimize that impact while prioritizing the safety of the aircraft and its crew. The pilots also abide by the [Helicopter Association International “Fly Neighborly Guide”](#) to manage positioning noise in descent and take off to the most extent possible.

**Q. Why do some helicopters leave the heliport, go to the Jetport, and then return?**

A. The medevac helicopters come to MMC from from all over the state and New Hampshire. Aircraft that have come to MMC from a longer than normal distance may need to leave the helipad to refuel at the Portland Jetport while the medical crew is transporting the patient into the hospital's care, and then return to collect the crew for the next mission.

**Q. Does the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air-traffic control tower (ATC) at the Jetport manage all flights into and out of MMC?**

A. Yes. All airspace in Portland is controlled by the ATC. This includes any special routing during times when there are multiple aircraft in the air space proximate to the Jetport. LifeFlight aircraft inbound to MMC are given priority handling by ATC.

**Q. Why can't flights be limited at night, to avoid neighborhood noise?**

A. All of the flights, just like 911 calls, are for emergencies. Unfortunately, by their very nature, emergencies cannot be scheduled.

**Q. What conditions preclude LifeFlight helicopters from operating?**

A. FAA weather minimums for visibility and ceilings will shut down flights, especially when there is icing conditions in the clouds.

**Q. How many flights from the Heliport hold outgoing patients?**

A. There are some patients who need care that cannot be provided at MMC. These are emergency patients with incredibly complex medical needs who need to be flown to specialty centers in Boston. In rare cases – roughly a dozen per year – they are flown from MMC's heliport in a medevac helicopter. Patients going beyond Boston are transported by the LifeFlight fixed wing airplane.