

Texting 911 FAQ



Text-to- 911 capabilities are available throughout the Southeast 911, 16-county region — Cass, Clay, Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Lancaster, Nemaha, Nuckolls, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline, Seward, Thayer and York counties. This FAQ provides valuable information about how to text 911 and the services limitations. Residents should familiarize themselves with the services limitations before using it.

What is Text to 911?

Text-to-911 is the ability to send text messages from a U.S. phone number to local 911 call centers. Only use Text-to- 911 if making a voice call to 911 is unsafe or not possible. This service is especially beneficial to those who are hard of hearing, deaf, or speech-impaired.

Some other examples of when Text-to- 911 would be beneficial:

- The caller cannot speak due to a threat, illness or medical condition.
- The caller has poor reception and can only send out a text message.
- Phone lines and cell phone towers are overwhelmed and only texts can get through.

Is Text to 911 available to me?

Text-to-911 is available for Cass, Clay, Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Lancaster, Nemaha, Nuckolls, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline, Seward, Thayer and York counties. Remember to “Call if You Can, Text if You Can’t.”

The large carriers, such as U.S. Cellular and Verizon have tested Text- to- 911, as have most of the smaller carriers, such as Veaero, T-Mobile and others within the 16-county region.

What are Text- to- 911 limits?

Text messaging is a “best effort service” provided by cell phone service providers; meaning cell phone service providers do not guarantee a message will be or ever was delivered. Since the Federal Communications Commission hasn’t required them to guarantee the service, there is a chance that a 911-call center will not receive a text from a person having an emergency.

Text messages also can take longer to receive, can be delivered out of order or may not be received. Additionally, Text to 9-1-1 does not work if the sender texts using a group message, emojis, sends pictures or videos. Apps that text other app users (such as WhatsApp) or texting via social media (such as Facebook Messenger) do not support Text to 9-1-1.

How do I know a 911-call center received my text?

Since texting is a “best effort service” by all cell phone service providers, the only way to know a text reached, a 911-call center is when the center texts back. If you believe, a text has not been received by a 911-call center, call 911.

Why is it better to make a voice call to 911?

Voice calls to 911 are the most efficient way to reach emergency help. That’s why the slogan for the service is “Call if You Can, Text if You Can’t.” Voice calls allow the 911 operator to quickly obtain information. Anyone can make a voice call to 911 using any wireless phone, regardless of the contract or plan.

The disadvantages of texting to 911 include:

- Texting takes more time and is limited to the text messages.
- Texting is a best effort service. In some instances, cell phone service providers may not relay the message from sender to the 911 center.
- A person cannot text to 911 without a service contract that includes texting.
- Texting to 911 does not automatically provide the location of the phone texting.

How do I Text to 911?

1. Remember: “Call if You Can, Text if You Can’t.”
2. Enter the numbers “911” in the “To” field.
3. The first text message to 911 should be brief and contain the location of the emergency and type of help needed.
4. Push the send button.
5. Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker.
6. Text in simple words – do not use abbreviations.
7. Keep text messages brief and concise.
8. Once you have initiated a Text- to- 911 conversation, do not turn off your phone until the dispatcher tells you it is ok to do so.