



## **In-Home Urgent Medical Care on Vashon**

***Your Questions Answered (2024-08-27)***

***Vashon Health Care District***

Vashon Island residents will soon be able to get urgent medical care without leaving the island or even leaving home. Vashon Health Care District (VHCD) has approved a contract with DispatchHealth, a leading provider of in-home medical care across the U.S.

The Commission's resolution also commits to a plan within 60 days for service at no cost for uninsured islanders. In addition, the resolution requires presentation within 30 days of a collaboration plan for consideration by the Board of Vashon Island Fire & Rescue (VIFR) for augmentation of the Fire District's Mobile Integrated Health Services, potentially including urgent care services with resources and funding from the VHCD.

### ***When will this start?***

DispatchHealth will introduce the service to Vashon throughout September, with in-home urgent medical care beginning by October 1st.

### ***What days and hours will this service be available?***

In-home medical care will be available 7 days per week, every day of the year, including weekends and holidays. A DispatchHealth crew will be on the island for eight hours daily including after hours on weekday evenings.

### ***Why only 8 hours/day?***

It's standard practice for urgent care services to be available for specific hours of the day. It's important to understand this is not 911 emergency service, which will continue to be provided 24/7 by VIFR. Generally, patients will be seen the same day they request care.

### ***Why did the Health Care District choose this approach rather than opening a brick-and-mortar urgent-care center like we see on the mainland?***

In-home care will begin immediately with no time or money spent on permits, construction, and other building costs. DispatchHealth experience over ten years tells us that in-home medical care improves access for many patients. People with limited mobility can get care in the comfort of their homes. A single mother with kids doesn't have to take her whole family to a clinic. People don't lose time from work or their business waiting in the lobby of an urgent care clinic because they can continue daily lives while waiting for a care team to arrive.

***Why act now with an off-island contractor when VIFR says it can do the same starting in January?***

The contract with DispatchHealth was ready months ago, in April. At the request of VIFR, the Health District delayed urgent care service to the island while VIFR and the District studied alternatives. The Health District believes it would not be right to keep this service from island taxpayers any longer than it already has.

DispatchHealth has everything ready to go, while VIFR is just getting started with a plan to provide expanded MIH services. Therefore, the Health District merged the options. It decided to start excellent home medical care now and give our community time to gain real-world experience with urgent care on Vashon and make a plan for the future. The DispatchHealth contract runs only two years and, in 18 months, requires the Health District to decide whether to renew. VHCD is committed to collaborating with VIFR on an urgent care plan in an inclusive way that will embrace the years of Vashon medical care experience available from Vashon medical professionals.

***What kind of medical training will DispatchHealth teams have?***

Two-person teams will arrive at your home in a clearly marked van. The same medical professionals you'd see in an urgent care center will provide care in your home, including a nurse practitioner or physician assistant plus a medical technician. A medical doctor will be on call for consultation.

***What's the difference between urgent care and emergency response?***

Urgent in-home care is same-day or next-day care for situations that can't wait for days or weeks for an appointment with a primary care clinic. Urgent care includes both diagnosis and treatment by medical practitioners. They can also prescribe medications.

Emergency in-home care is when you need to call 911 for severe conditions that could even be life-threatening, such as chest pain, loss of consciousness, shortness of breath, symptoms of a stroke, severe bleeding, and major broken bones. Life-saving care by EMTs and paramedics does not include diagnosis or writing prescriptions but often includes transport to a hospital.

***What illnesses, injuries, and procedures can the DispatchHealth team treat?***

The mobile team will be able to treat a wide variety of urgent, but not life-threatening, illnesses and injuries, including – but not limited to – lacerations; minor bone breaks; strains or sprains; fevers; flu; migraines; infections of the eye, sinus, ear, and urinary tract; objects in the eye; sore throats; nosebleeds; diarrhea; constipation; dizziness; hives; and rashes.

***How will the DispatchHealth vehicle be equipped?***

The in-home care vans have the equipment to support nearly every medical treatment situation that a walk-in urgent care facility on the mainland would provide.

***How do I go about arranging for a Dispatch Health team to visit me at home?***

You have three ways to get a team to your home. You can call [Our own number coming soon!]. You can go online to the DispatchHealth website at <https://www.dispatchhealth.com/>. You can download the free DispatchHealth app from the Apple or Google app websites.

***What questions will I need to answer?***

Each of the three access methods asks the same set of triage questions about your health situation. They are the same kinds of questions you answer when going to an urgent care center on the mainland. The aim is to get you the right care. For example, if your answers reveal you have a need for emergency care, you will be advised to call 911.

***What if all the appointments for that day are filled?***

Generally, service will be the same day you call. However, it's bound to happen, that a day will be especially busy. In those situations — especially if you contact DispatchHealth at the end of the service day — you may need to delay your care until the next available appointment. You also have the option you have before DispatchHealth began service, to go to a mainland urgent care facility.

***Does DispatchHealth accept my insurance?***

DispatchHealth accepts most major insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid. Following your in-home care visit, DispatchHealth will call in prescriptions, update your doctors, and handle billing with your insurance company.

***What if I don't have health insurance, or DispatchHealth doesn't accept my insurance?***

VHCD plans to cover the cost of service for uninsured individuals. The Health District Commissioners have ordered a plan for uninsured to be in place by November 1st. In addition, you can pay a flat rate of \$375 at the time of treatment via credit card. This flat rate, with no surprises, includes everything provided in the care visit — medications administered, procedures performed, and on-site lab tests obtained. Payment methods include credit, debit, health savings account (HSA), health reimbursement account (HRA), and flexible spending account (FSA) payments.

At times, third-party service providers may be recommended for imaging, labs, prescriptions, or other healthcare services. In these instances, the patient will be billed separately by those services.

***Can the Dispatch team provide care for me at a location other than my home?***

Yes. They can, for example, come to your work location.

***Why base a team that serves Vashon in Tacoma?***

The DispatchHealth operating base in Tacoma provides a deep bench of medical care staff to cover vacations and illnesses, as well as the daily support needed to restock and maintain the van. A DispatchHealth team will be on island for eight hours a day, 365 days a year. Teams work a 10-hour shift to allow for travel time.

***We all know about the ferry problems. What if a ferry is canceled?***

We are developing back up plans for those situations. Teams may need to drive around to another ferry terminal, for example.

***Will Dispatch share its records of my visit with my primary care physician and other providers?***

Yes. As they do in the other communities where they provide care, they have systems to share your medical records as you request, while following all federal medical privacy regulations.

***Does the contract between the Health Care District and DispatchHealth have a termination date?***

Yes. It's a two-year contract with a go/no-go decision on whether to renew it or not at 18 months. The goal is to complete the long-term planning about the island's urgent care described in the Commission's resolution by early 2026, before a decision must be made on renewing the DispatchHealth contract. As Commission Chair Tom Langland put it: "We'll have 18 months of learning what Vashon needs with the benefit of real-world experience. We hope VIFR will join with us, to learn and collaborate. And during those 18 months, the island will be getting high-quality urgent medical care.

***Can the Dispatch team make referrals if I need additional care***

Referral services depend on your wishes and the terms of your insurance coverage.

***Will translation services be available for Spanish-speaking patients?***

Yes, DispatchHealth provides translation services for most languages.

***What is the District paying for this service?***

The District is paying \$560,000 a year for the access to this care. This is approximately \$4 a month for each Island resident.

***What if I have more questions?***

Contact us at [info@vashonhealthcare.org](mailto:info@vashonhealthcare.org) any time.