

Position Statement

Adopted November 5, 2020 by the
Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado.

Position Statement on the Safe Pre-Hospital Use of Ketamine by EMS Professionals

The Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado (EMSAC) represents emergency medical professionals and organizations from across Colorado whose most important duty is to protect the safety and health of patients in our care.

The highly publicized police custody death of Elijah McClain, in Aurora, Colorado, thrust ketamine use in the field into the national spotlight. The specialty of EMS medicine is dedicated to the care of patients in the prehospital environment. We recognize the importance of caring for patients with mental health, delirium and drug related emergencies and treating those patients with respect and dignity. Our medical professionalism and clinical expertise have made us unified and resolute in the following principles:

Medical emergencies must be handled by emergency medical professionals. EMS personnel often encounter people who are agitated and may pose a threat to themselves and others. Medical emergencies such as psychosis, delirium, severe metabolic derangement or drug toxicity are routinely managed by EMS providers who operate under the direction of a physician using strict protocols. While EMTs and paramedics work closely with law enforcement officers in many situations, we do not allow law enforcement or other non-medical persons to dictate our medical care.

Severe agitation has been associated with a cascade of medical effects including acidosis, hyperthermia, dehydration and electrolyte abnormalities, leading to sudden death. Early recognition and treatment of severe agitation can be essential to patient survival. Safe care of these patients includes the administration of sedating medications such as midazolam and ketamine to rapidly sedate severely agitated patients. This is supported by the medical literature and by vast amounts of clinical experience.

Ketamine is a common medication that is widely used in the hospital emergency department and in prehospital care. It is effective for the control of delirium in acute psychotic emergencies and drug intoxications, pain management and for sedation. Its safety profile makes it the chosen medication for pediatric pain control. Ketamine is also recognized as a safe and effective alternative pain control medication for adult patients that suffer from opioid addiction.

Ketamine is a safe, effective choice in the prehospital setting. Paramedics are trained to conduct appropriate medical assessments prior to any medication administration, and must follow specific protocols for medication dosing,

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patient monitoring and timely transportation to an emergency department for further care.

Despite the importance and safety of Ketamine and other sedatives, EMSAC acknowledges that effective protocols, training and clinical judgment are essential to the safe use of these medications and that powerful sedatives should never be used without a legitimate medical justification. For these reasons EMSAC supports the continued oversight of EMS providers by qualified, experienced and involved physicians specializing in prehospital medicine. EMSAC further supports an accountable and effective oversight process of EMS providers by their employers and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

We firmly oppose the use of ketamine or any other sedative/hypnotic agent to chemically incapacitate someone solely for a law enforcement purpose and not for legitimate medical or safety reasons.

The EMSAC Board of Directors comprises EMS professionals who are familiar with the literature and practice of managing agitated patients. EMSAC shares its position with the consensus positions of The American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma (ACS-COT), the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), the National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO), the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP) and the National Association of EMTs (NAEMT), the American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) and numerous other medical specialty organizations.

The Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado is a not-for-profit society of emergency medical service professionals, founded in 1973. EMSAC is involved in many facets of EMS, and whose three primary missions are to:

- Advocate,
- Communicate,
- Educate.

Membership of nearly 3,000 comprises EMS agencies; EMTs, paramedics and EMS emergency medical responders; physicians and nurses; and emergency dispatchers, medical educators, researchers and EMS training institutions.

Members are both paid and volunteer professionals, from the urban centers of the state as well as our wide open rural and frontier regions. Our members serve with ambulance services, fire departments, search and rescue teams and ski patrols; and in hospitals, industrial plants, dispatch centers and the military.



The Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado
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