Residents of the West Midlands Region are being urged <u>not</u> to call an ambulance unless it is an emergency after new figures revealed 999 calls have increased by five per cent each year for the last 15 years.

West Midlands Ambulance Service receives more than 2,500 emergency calls each day but of those only around ten per cent are genuine emergencies such as a person choking, falling unconscious or having chest pains, serious blood loss or a stroke.

The 'Choose Well' campaign launched a few days ago, aims to direct patients to the best service for them during autumn and winter, with the range of options ranging from keeping common remedies for coughs and colds at home or visiting a pharmacy for over-the-counter medicines to going to a 'walk-in' treatment centre or a GP.

Direct of Nursing Sandy Brown said: "We are currently seeing large spikes in demand with the number of calls as much as 50 per cent above what we would have expected. In these circumstances, it becomes very challenging to get to all of the patients who really need us quickly.

"There is still a common misconception if you get taken to hospital by ambulance, you will be seen more quickly. This is simply untrue. All patients are triaged to see how serious their case is when they arrive at A and E, if everybody understood this, there would be many fewer 999 calls.

"If our crews and vehicles are dealing with minor cases, they are not able to get to the patients with genuine life-threatening illness or injury which ultimately could put lives at risk."

Visit www.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 for advice on a range of conditions. In an emergency always call 999.



**NHS Direct**

Tel: 0845 46 47

999 is for life threatening emergencies only, choose well