Most of Alabama now protected by Trauma Communications System

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The Trauma Communication System now protects more than half of Alabama through regional systems in the Birmingham, North Alabama and Gulf regions of the state, which will decrease the likelihood of death in trauma cases. In early October a system will begin operations in East Alabama, which will mean three-quarters of the state will be covered by this advanced system.

Under the system, injured patients will now be identified by emergency medical technicians at the scene who will route the patient to the closest hospital which has the resources to care for him or her. The EMT will contact the trauma communications center, which knows the current status of all hospitals in the area, so that the patient is routed only to the hospital best able to provide care.

Trauma is the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 45, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health. State health officials estimate that 60 percent of injured patients are initially taken to a hospital that does not have the proper resources, and are then transferred to a different hospital hours later.

Because trauma patients' survival rates improve dramatically when they are evaluated, treated and transported to the correct hospital within the first hour after being injured, this system saves lives.

"This whole system is geared so that no one ever has to be transferred," said Dr. John Campbell, medical director of the Office of EMS and Trauma. "They're always taken to the hospital that can give them definitive care immediately, so hundreds of lives can be saved every year."

The Birmingham area has had this system in place for 13 years and has documented a 12 percent decrease in its death rate. The Alabama Legislature approved an expansion of the statewide trauma system, which is under the leadership of the Department of Public Health. Alabama will have the first statewide system of this type in the United States, and will serve as a model for the nation.

Almost 80 percent of Alabama's trauma cases are caused by motor vehicle crashes. A trauma system is a coordinated system of care that includes emergency medical technicians, a trauma communications system, hospital emergency department staff, trauma surgeons and other physicians who provide needed surgical and other care. These providers work together to

determine the best possible course of action for the injured persons reported through the 911 system.

In March 2007, Alabama established a statewide trauma system with the enactment of Act Number 07-299. This act requires the establishment of Regional Trauma Advisory Councils to work with and advise the State Trauma Advisory Council.

For more information contact Dr. John Campbell, EMS and Trauma Medical Director, at (334) 206-5383 or visit www.adph.org/ems/

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