# How to respond when an SOS alert comes from a family monitored medical alarm

## Stay calm and check the alert first

When a family monitored medical alarm sends an SOS alert, the first thing to do is pause and read the notification carefully. The message will usually tell you who triggered it and where they are. Do not assume the worst, many alerts are accidental button presses, or the person pressed the button as a precaution. Take a breath, then move through a simple response protocol that keeps everyone safe without unnecessary panic.

## Confirm what the alert means

The SOS alert from a family monitored medical alarm is a distress signal, but it does not always mean a life-threatening emergency. It could be a fall, a sudden illness, or simply the wearer feeling unsafe for a reason they cannot explain quickly. Your first step is to establish contact. If the system supports two way communication, use it to speak directly with the person. Ask clear questions: “Are you hurt?” “Do you need an ambulance?” “Can you sit up or move?” Their answers will tell you how urgent the situation really is.

If you cannot reach them through the device, try their home phone or a neighbour’s number. A lack of response could mean they are unconscious or unable to speak, which moves the alert into a higher priority category. Keep a list of emergency contacts handy, neighbours, a nearby relative, or a building manager, so you can quickly get someone to the location if needed. A well-prepared caregiver plan will already include these details.

This is where a service like familyr.co.nz becomes useful. The system is designed to give family members clear information at the moment an alert arrives, so you can decide what to do next without guesswork. Having GPS location and fall detection built into the wearable means you know roughly where the person is and whether a sudden movement might have caused the alarm.

## Decide on the level of response

Not every SOS alert requires an ambulance. A common mistake is to call emergency services straight away before you know the facts. If the person is conscious and talking, ask if they feel they need medical help. Sometimes they have pressed the button because they felt dizzy or frightened, but after a minute they are fine. In that case, a reassurance call and a check-in later in the day might be all that is needed.



However, if the person is confused, cannot speak clearly, or reports chest pain, breathing trouble, or a bad fall, treat it as a genuine emergency. Call 111 (in New Zealand) or your local emergency number without delay. Stay on the line with the wearer if possible, and let the dispatcher know you have a family monitored medical alarm that can provide location data. That extra detail can help paramedics find the person faster, especially if they are outside or in an unfamiliar place.

## Activate your family network

One advantage of a family monitored medical alarm is that multiple people can receive the same alert. If you are the first to see it, reach out to the others in your family network. A quick group message or call can confirm who is closest, who can leave work, and who has the best chance of reaching the wearer quickly. This avoids duplication of effort and ensures someone is always monitoring the situation while others are on the move.

If you have a caregiver plan written down, this is the moment to follow it. The plan should list the order in which contacts are called, what each person is responsible for, and any medical information that paramedics might need. For example, allergies, medications, and pre-existing conditions. Share these details with the responding family member so they can pass them on to emergency staff if necessary.

A good response protocol also covers what happens after the immediate crisis. If the person is taken to hospital, one family member should go with them while another stays at the home to

secure it, look after pets, or update the rest of the family. Clear roles reduce confusion and help everyone stay focused.

## Use the location data wisely

If your family monitored medical alarm includes GPS location, treat that information as a starting point. The coordinates might show the person is at home, in the garden, or at a local shop. Do not rely on the location alone, always try to speak with the person first. GPS can be accurate to a few metres, but it will not tell you whether they are inside or outside, or whether they have fallen behind a building. Combine the location with what the person tells you and what you know about their usual routine.

For instance, if the alert comes from a park where the wearer walks every morning, you might guess they have tripped or felt unwell during their walk. If the location is their home and it is the middle of the night, the chances of a genuine emergency are higher. Use common sense and context to interpret the data, rather than treating it as a final answer.

When you call emergency services, give them the GPS coordinates or a street address from the alert. This can save minutes, especially if the person is in a rural area or a large building complex. Paramedics are trained to respond to medical alarms, but they still need a clear location to work from. A family monitored medical alarm that shares location data bridges that gap.



## Keep the lines of communication open

After the initial response, maintain contact with the wearer and with other family members. If the person stays at home, check on them an hour later and again the next morning. Sometimes the effects of a fall or a fright take a while to show. A sudden change in mobility, confusion, or pain might appear hours after the alert. Do not assume that because they seemed okay at the time, everything is fine.

If the person was taken to hospital, nominate one family member to be the main point of contact with medical staff. That person can then relay updates to the rest of the family network. This prevents the hospital from being overwhelmed with calls and ensures consistent information flows back to everyone who needs it.

For future alerts, review what happened and whether your response could be improved. Did you have the right contact numbers? Did everyone know their role? Was the caregiver plan up to date? A family monitored medical alarm is only as effective as the human response behind it. Regular check-ins with the wearer and your family network keep the system running smoothly.

## Prepare before the next alert

The best time to plan is now, not when an SOS arrives. Sit down with the person who wears the alarm and discuss what they want to happen in different scenarios. Some people want an ambulance called for any fall, while others prefer a family member to check on them first. Write down their wishes and share them with the family network. Make sure everyone knows how to use the monitoring app or web portal that comes with the alarm. If the system allows two way communication, practise using it so you are comfortable when it matters.

Keep a list of emergency contacts on your phone and on paper near the home. Include neighbours, doctors, and local taxi services in case transport is needed. Test the alarm with the wearer every month to confirm the battery and signal are working. A device that has not been tested might fail when you need it most. A quick monthly check takes two minutes and can prevent a lot of stress later.

Consider also what happens if you are the one who receives the alert but cannot respond, for example, if you are driving, in a meeting, or asleep. Set up an automatic contact sequence in your family network so that if one person does not acknowledge the alert within a few minutes, the next person in the list gets notified. This ensures no alert falls through the cracks.

Some families create a shared online document with key information: medical history, medication list, doctor contacts, and a home floor plan. Paramedics can use a floor plan to find the person faster, especially if the house has many rooms or stairs. While a family monitored medical alarm provides the alert and location, the extra preparation you do as a family makes the whole system work better.



## When the crisis is over

After the alert has been resolved, take time to debrief with your family network. Talk about what went well and what could be smoother. Did everyone get the alert quickly? Was the location accurate? Did the two way communication work clearly? Use this feedback to update your caregiver plan and your contact sequence. The goal is not to find fault but to make the next response faster and less stressful.

Also check in with the person who wears the alarm. They might feel embarrassed or worried that they caused a fuss. Reassure them that pressing the SOS button was the right thing to do. A family monitored medical alarm exists to give them confidence and to keep them safe. Every alert, even a false one, is a reminder that the system is working and that someone is watching out for them.

By staying calm, communicating clearly, and using the information the alarm provides, you can turn an unsettling moment into a controlled response. The technology does the heavy lifting of detection and notification. Your job as a family member is to bring the human judgment and care that turns an alert into a positive outcome.