

NEWS

St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital recertified by state as a remote treatment stroke center

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LAVONIA, Ga. – January 26, 2026 – St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital once again has been designated as a Remote Treatment Stroke Center by the Georgia Department of Public Health Office of EMS and Trauma.

The designation recognizes Sacred Heart's quality care for stroke patients, especially its use of telemedicine to provide state-of-the-art emergency treatment locally. Using the REACH telestroke system, doctors at Sacred Heart can consult in real time with specialists at Augusta University Medical Center to administer a powerful clot-busting drug that can stop many strokes in their tracks.

"We are proud to achieve continuous designation as a Remote Treatment Stroke Center since 2019," said Stephanie Clouse, Director of Administrative Operations. "The certification process is demanding and highly detailed. I'm proud of our medical staff, hospital staff, and our partners in EMS for their commitment to providing quality care for our patients and our community."

Stroke is the nation's leading cause of disability and one of the leading causes of death. Georgia is the core the nation's "stroke belt" – a swath of states from Virginia to Texas in which stroke is significantly more common than in other parts of the U.S.

In a stroke, blood flow to part of the brain is interrupted by a blood clot or torn blood vessel. Brain cells "downstream" become stressed and up to 2 million die per minute, damaging any function handled by that part of the brain. For the 80 percent of patients whose stroke is caused by a blood clot, treatment with the clot-busting drug Alteplase can stop the stroke in its tracks and even reverse some effects. But time is critical: in most cases, the drug must be given within about three hours of the onset of symptoms to be effective.

"Alteplase is the most powerful front-line tool we have in the treatment of ischemic stroke, and it can actually reduce or prevent damage to the brain," said Tyler Davison, manager of Sacred Heart's Emergency Department. "It's vital that it be administered correctly and only to patients who meet rigorous safety guidelines. Being part of St. Mary's Health Care System and our association with Augusta University Medical Center allow us to do that."

Warning signs of stroke

In a stroke, time is brain. It's essential to call 911 as soon as symptoms appear:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking; dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

For more information about stroke, visit the American Stroke Association at www.strokeassociation.org. For information about St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital, visit www.stmarys-health.org.

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St. Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital emergency department staff and physician demonstrate the REACH telestroke system. Sacred Heart has again been designated a Remote Treatment Stroke Center by the state of Georgia.