

Level IV Trauma Facilities

Trauma care in the rural setting offers additional challenges that are not often encountered in the urban environment. Alaska and its vastness and distance, compound these problems and critically injured patients in remote areas of the state are true challenges for all healthcare providers. In developing the criteria for level IV trauma facilities, the American College of Surgeons “Resources for Optimal Care of the Injured Patient” was used as the most commonly accepted standard.

For any given injury severity, the chance of dying in the rural environment is much greater than in the urban setting. Characteristics unique to the rural environment include access to EMS and medical care that is often hindered by distance, weather, availability of medevac services and long transport times. Limited training resources and infrequent exposure to severe injuries erode knowledge and skills among rural providers. Often a heavier burden is placed on health aides, nurses, EMTs who may be the first providers that assess the patients and may need to care for them for prolonged periods while awaiting transfer.

In order to provide optimal care for the injured patient, each rural facility should participate in the overall state trauma system. Level IV designation process is important in that trauma care provided in an organized, systematic approach will

improve patient outcomes. The requirements for Level IV designation represent minimal standards for facilities to meet or exceed. Just as in Level I, II, and III centers ongoing review of care will result in improved quality and outcomes.

Rural facilities must be assessed as to their capabilities, based on size, institutional resources, and the qualifications and availability of health professionals. By following ACS standards of trauma care, patients are assured that they will receive the best possible care, and that if they are critically injured and require specialty care, they will be recognized quickly, stabilized appropriately, and transferred in a timely manner.