



Emergency Room versus Urgent Care Treatment

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Emergency Care Treatment Options

Access to immediate and effective treatment in an emergency is the goal of every individual when injured or sick. This is especially true if the person is your child. There are options in each situation that can result in receiving effective care that can save you time and be far less costly.

Where can you receive treatment in the event of an emergency? There are several options to consider based on the location, time and conditions of the emergency:

- Your family doctor — this is the best place to start, especially with an illness, since they know your personal health history.
- Telemedicine — the ability to speak to a medical professional immediately and be referred to the appropriate medical setting. With smart phone technology, photos and other information can be transmitted for immediate evaluation.
- An urgent care center — if the situation is not life threatening but needs immediate attention, such as a cut requiring stitches.
- The hospital emergency room — for the treatment of severe and life threatening conditions that require diagnostic testing and have access to specialists for immediate care.
- 911 Emergency Response — for a severe and life threatening condition that may be aggravated or made worse by moving the injured party. This would include severe trauma to the neck, spine or possible internal injuries. The emergency response team will be in contact with an emergency physician to arrange immediate treatment and transportation to the appropriate trauma center.

Time and Expense

Time is always very important in the event of an emergency. Each of these options will cost you both time and money, depending on your choice. The urgent care facility can provide immediate care at a cost effective basis, since the individual incidents will not take too much of the professional's time to treat. The same treatment at an emergency room will be a different story. Your medical condition will be evaluated immediately and then placed into triage, meaning the most serious conditions will be treated first, regardless of when they arrive at the emergency room. It is not unusual to wait several hours for treatment of a cut only requiring stitches as more serious conditions are treated as they occur.

In addition, the cost of emergency room treatment can be ten times as expensive as that received in a medical office or urgent care facility. Most employer health plans have a copay or deductible that is several times higher than treatment at an urgent care facility.

Your Options for Effective Care

Your first concern is knowledge of what to do in the event of an emergency. Practice as a family unit based upon your location and conditions what to do, who to call and where to go in the event of any of the following injuries or illnesses:

- Fractured leg or arm
- Severe cut and bleeding
- Head or eye injury
- Severe burns, especially to the face
- Venomous snake bites and insect stings
- Auto accident
- Drowning
- Chest pains
- Shortness of breath
- Choking
- High fevers
- Internal bleeding

How to respond to these and many other conditions is covered by a basic first aid course sponsored by the Red Cross, schools, scouts and other organizations. You and your family members should all know the initial responses to conditions as they arise. Discuss what to do and where to go in an emergency. Visit the urgent care facilities in your areas in advance of an emergency. Almost all urgent care sites are listed on mobile apps such as Yelp, which also include information from previous patients as to their treatment experiences. Many symptoms that can be treated at an urgent care facility include:

- Fever without a rash
- Minor trauma such as cuts and sprains
- Persistent diarrhea
- Sore throat
- Vomiting

If these and other symptoms have previously been treated by your physician, you can also request a same day appointment.

Be Ready in an Emergency Situation

Raising a family and being an active adult means that sooner or later you will encounter emergency situations. It is good policy to be prepared, borrowing a phrase from the scouts. This would include knowing where both the nearest emergency room and urgent care treatment facilities are located. A recent study cited the fact that 48% of emergency room visits are because the doctor's office was not open.

Urgent care is not emergency care. Emergency rooms are designed to handle fast care to life threatening conditions. Most health plans can provide information in advance as to which urgent care offices are in your area. If you are in doubt, however, it's better to be safe and select the closest emergency room.