



When Should You Go to the Emergency Room?



Too many Americans rely on emergency rooms as their primary source of medical care. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, visits to the ER rose by 2.3 million a year over the last fifteen years.

This is a problem, for various reasons. Emergency rooms full of people with non-urgent conditions can delay care for those who come in with truly dire medical needs. Also, many chronic conditions are more effectively (and cost-effectively) treated by primary care doctors in a non-emergency setting.

There are times, however, when the ER is the only right place to go. This quick reference guide will help you decide when an emergency room is the right facility to treat you, a family member or loved one. As always, if someone is unconscious, unable to breathe, or has a serious injury, call 911.

Visit the ER for these severe injuries and illnesses

Emergency rooms are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and offer the widest range of services to treat an emergency. You should go to the ER for any of these life-threatening or disabling conditions:

- Alcohol poisoning
- Attempted suicide
- Bleeding with pregnancy
- Chest pain or heart attack symptoms – call 911
- Complex fractures and dislocated joints
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Difficulty breathing
- Disorientation or difficulty speaking
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Gunshot wounds
- Head injuries or trauma
- High fevers, especially among children
- Loss of vision
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Paralysis
- Poisoning
- Possible overdose
- Seizure or loss of consciousness
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe allergic reactions
- Severe or uncontrolled bleeding
- Severe burns
- Stroke or signs of stroke
- Sudden numbness or weakness

Freestanding emergency facilities

Most major cities and even some rural areas now offer stand-alone emergency facilities. They are not always associated with local hospitals, but may be easier to reach when immediate care is needed.

If you use one of these freestanding locations, keep in mind that you may still need to be transported to an actual hospital if you are having a stroke, heart attack or other severe medical emergency.

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