

For many of us, the term **Emergency Room** is synonymous with immediate medical attention. Did you know 40% of visits to hospital emergency rooms are for non-urgent or semi-urgent problems? Using emergency rooms for non-urgent care clogs emergency rooms, strains precious resources and increases the final cost of services by a factor of up to ten times. Do *you* know, in general, when to use the emergency room and what alternative treatment sites and resources are available?

Classic examples of urgent, but not critical, conditions are Otitis Media (middle ear infection) especially in infants, ankle sprains from sports injuries, back pain, simple fractures and minor cuts and lacerations. Especially if there is a degree of pain, we have been conditioned to immediately think of the ER for these types of non-emergency situations. However, the trend in the last few years is to have these conditions treated in freestanding facilities known as Urgent Care Centers. In the ER, you may sit for hours as more serious conditions are treated first. In an Urgent Care Center, quality care for these conditions is much more immediate.

Urgent Care Centers

Urgent care is defined as the delivery of ambulatory medical care outside of a hospital emergency department. Urgent Care Centers treat many problems that can be seen in a primary care physician's office, but urgent care centers offer some services that are generally not available in primary care physician offices, such as x-ray facilities which allow for treatment of minor fractures and foreign bodies and minor trauma rooms which allow for repair of minor and moderate-severity lacerations. Here are some of the common conditions treated at Urgent Care Centers:

- Cold, flu, coughs, sore throats and earaches
- Vomiting, diarrhea and stomachaches
- Dehydration
- Minor lacerations and wound care
- Minor skin infections and burns
- Simple Fractures, sprains and dislocations
- Minor eye problems and nose bleeds
- Sports Injuries
- Asthma and allergies
- Headaches and migraines

Other reasons to try Urgent Care:

- Most urgent care centers are open 7 days a week, with extended evening, weekend and holiday hours.
- No need to schedule an appointment.
- Many locations nationwide so you can find a location near your home or job.
- They provide significant savings, compared to going to an emergency room.
- Astellas Health Plan co-pay is \$50 vs. \$100 co-pay for ER visits (co-pays waived if admitted)

Convenient Care Clinics

Another type of treatment site, Convenient Care Clinics (CCCs), have shown significant growth in the past three years (600%). CCCs are health care clinics located in retail stores, supermarkets and pharmacies that treat uncomplicated minor illnesses and provide a wide range of preventive health care services. They are sometimes called "retail clinics", "retail-based clinics" or "walk-in medical clinics." CCCs are usually staffed by nurse practitioners (NPs) or physician assistants (PAs) under the guidance of an offsite physician. Some CCCs, however, are actually staffed by physicians. The primary reasons people use convenient care clinics are 1. no appointments are needed; 2. they could not get in to see their primary care physician on a timely basis; 3. lower out of pocket costs (\$20 co-pay under the Astellas Health Plan) and 4. one stop shopping for pharmacy or groceries to coincide with the clinic visit.

CCCs treat common family illnesses, such as:

- Cold and Flu ; Sinus Infections; Allergies; Minor injuries, burns and rashes; Sore throat ; Headaches; Sprains; strains; Bronchitis; Ear infections; Urinary tract infections and diarrhea.

Emergency Rooms

Emergency services are for sudden and serious injuries or illnesses. If you have a condition that requires emergency care, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. Going to the emergency room for non-emergencies delays treatment for those with true emergencies.

Contact your primary care provider as soon as possible after receiving emergency services. Your primary care provider will update your records and assist you if additional care is needed.

According to the American College of Emergency Medicine, emergency conditions include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Fainting
- Chest pain or pressure
- Uncontrolled bleeding

- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Sudden severe pain
- Poisoning
- Major injuries, such as broken bones
- Sudden facial drooping or weakness in an arm or leg

Did You Know?

- Average emergency wait time in the United States is 4 hours and 7 minutes.
- Utah has highest state average at 8 hours and 17 minutes.
- LA-USC Medical Center has average wait time of 15 hours
- Due to economic pressures, California now has 7.1 emergency rooms per 1 million people. The United States average is 19.9 emergency rooms per 1 million people. This is a 2009 number. Since then, more emergency rooms have closed in California.

This information is based off of a survey done by "Press Ganey" in 2009. Web site address is www.pressganey.com