

How to choose between emergency room and urgent care service

When you get hurt, do you know which type of care to seek? Should you call your primary care practitioner? Should you head to urgent care? Is an emergency room in your near future?

There are guidelines to follow to help you make the best choice. But first, here's how each type of facility works.

Emergency rooms (ERs) are set up as a triage, meaning patients are served in order from most ill to least ill. Patients with life-threatening injuries or illnesses are treated first, while others with minor injuries or illnesses must wait.

Urgent care facilities operate much like ERs, but the level of injury or illness they typically handle is not as severe. Wait times for minor injuries or conditions are typically shorter than at an ER.

When you are sick, the last thing you want to do is wait for care. This makes choosing the right health care facility important. You may avoid the ER or urgent care entirely by calling your primary care practitioner (PCP) first to describe your symptoms.

Learning the signs of serious illnesses, using good judgment, and knowing what kind of medical attention you need can help you select the right type of care.

Urgent care

Urgent care means health care for an illness or injury with symptoms of sudden/recent onset that require medical care the same day. Most health issues do not require emergency medical care. In fact, you can save time, and often save money, by using in-network urgent care clinics available to you. A visit to urgent care may be appropriate for:

- Deep cuts or wounds that may require stitches
- Sprains, strains or deep bruises
- Mild to moderate asthma attacks
- Ear infections
- Urinary tract infections
- Upper respiratory infections
- Coughs and congestion
- Diarrhea
- Sore throats
- Insect bites
- Rashes

During business hours, services for urgent care situations should be provided in your PCP's office whenever possible. For after-hour services, please contact your PCP directly.



Emergency care

In the event of a medical emergency, ER care is covered anywhere. You may have to call 911 for immediate medical care for your emergency. Please contact your PCP as soon as possible to arrange follow-up care, if needed.

If you are seen in the ER and then admitted to the hospital, you must notify Aspirus Health Plan within 48 hours of being medically able. Please call us at 866.631.5404.

Examples of emergency medical conditions include, but are not limited to:

- Chest pain lasting two minutes or more
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Sudden or severe pain
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- Sudden dizziness, weakness, or change in vision
- Severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Change in mental status (e.g., confusion, difficulty arousing)

For emergency medical conditions that occur in our service area, you should go to the closest in-network emergency facility. When out of our service area, go to the closest hospital emergency facility. Please arrange follow-up care through your PCP.

Covered expenses for emergency care from a non-participating provider are limited to the maximum out-of-network allowable fee.

Please contact your PCP prior to receiving any non-emergency care that may be rendered in an ER or urgent care setting.

If your situation is an emergency and you need a prior authorization for medication, please call 866.631.5404 and let us know. Aspirus Health Plan follows time requirements in responding to expedited requests, as required by federal law.

What is an emergency?

An emergency medical condition has severe acute symptoms, including intense pain, that leads a prudent layperson with an average knowledge of health and medicine to reasonably conclude that a lack of immediate medical attention will likely result in:

- Serious danger to the person's health, or with respect to a pregnant woman, serious danger to the health of the woman or her unborn child
- Serious impairment to the person's bodily functions
- Serious dysfunction of one or more of the person's body organs or parts