

When and Where to Get Medical Care

Sometimes you'll know right away if your child needs quick medical care. Other times, it's hard to be sure. And if you do, should you go to the ER, call your doctor, or visit an urgent care center? These guidelines can help.

When Should I Call 911?

For a serious emergency, call 911. Some situations are so serious that you need the help of trained medical personnel on the way to the hospital.

Call 911 if your child:

- isn't breathing or is turning blue
- is unconscious after a fall
- is having a seizure
- has a serious allergic reaction
- has a broken bone that sticks out through the skin
- took an unknown amount of medicine and is now hard to rouse
- is choking
- has a large cut that won't stop bleeding

When Should I Go to the Emergency Department?

An ER (emergency room) — also called an emergency department (ED) — can handle many serious problems. They are ready for life-threatening illnesses and injuries at any time of the day or night.

Go to the ER if your child has:

- trouble breathing
- unusual sleepiness or confusion
- a stiff neck and a fever
- a continuous fast heartbeat
- ingested a poison, drug, or unknown substance
- a head injury and is vomiting
- an eye injury
- a serious burn

When Should I Call a Health Care Provider?

Call your primary care provider's office with any questions or non-urgent health concerns. They can help you decide what steps to take and how.

Call for problems such as:

- a fever
- ear pain
- a sore throat
- belly pain
- vomiting or diarrhea
- a headache that doesn't go away
- possible dehydration
- rash
- wheezing
- a lasting cough

Calling your child's regular provider for these kinds of concerns supports "continuity of care" (always seeing a provider who knows you and your child).

What Can Be Treated at an Urgent Care Center?

What if you can't get to your provider's office or it's after hours and the office is not open? Then, consider getting medical care at an urgent care center.

Urgent care centers can manage the same problems as your regular health care provider. These centers also can provide services like X-rays, stitches, and splints.

Other problems they can treat include:

- simple bone injuries
- minor burns
- cuts
- splinter removal
- sprains and other sports injuries
- minor animal bites
- fever
- belly pain
- vomiting or diarrhea

What About Telehealth?

Kids can be seen for many minor injuries and illnesses through a "visit" to a health provider using your phone or computer. This is called telehealth or telemedicine. Through an app on your phone, you can talk to a provider face-to-face — and the provider can see you and your child. Your regular health care provider or health system may provide telemedicine services.

Consider telemedicine when your child has:

- rashes
- minor cuts or burns

- pinkeye (conjunctivitis)
- colds
- fever
- mild allergic reactions
- vomiting
- diarrhea

Whether your child got care in an ER, at an urgent care center, or through a telemedicine visit, follow up with your primary care provider afterward. That way, your provider has the most up-to-date information about your child and can continue any needed follow-up care.

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