

# Urgent Care vs Emergency Room: Deciding What is Right for You

## URGENT CARE CENTERS

Walk-in medical centers, such as Lee Convenient Care, are designed to provide quality, cost-efficient care in a short time frame for children and adults requiring prompt and/or minor emergency care. An appointment or referral is not required. Walk-in centers are open during the day and also have extended evening and weekend hours.

The full-time staff comprises physicians, registered nurses, technicians and support personnel. Lab and x-ray services are available on-site.



Walk-in care is appropriate when:

- Your primary doctor is unavailable
- You do not have a regular doctor
- You have an illness or injury that is not life-threatening and needs prompt care
- You have routine health issues

In addition, some services are available that are generally not available through a primary care setting. For example:

- Digital x-rays that allow for quick treatment of minor fractures and foreign bodies
- Procedure rooms to facilitate repair of minor to moderate-severity lacerations
- School, sports, DOT, or pre-employment physicals on a walk-in basis
- Collection, review, and reporting for blood tests performed by an outside lab

To help you decide what type of care is best for you or your family member, go to <http://www.leememorial.org/convenient-care/index.asp> and review the information there.



### *Value*

Compared to hospital emergency room visits, urgent care provides significant savings to patients and insurers for episodic care that can't wait for an appointment at a physician's office.

### *Convenience*

According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), patient visits to hospital emergency rooms averaged approximately 3.3 hours in 2005. Many health issues treated in hospital emergency departments can receive timely treatment in less than one hour in an urgent care setting. Abdominal pain, chest pain, fever and cough accounted for nearly one-fifth of all ER visits in 2005. Some of these symptoms could be treated in an urgent care facility in a more efficient manner than in an emergency department.

### *Appropriateness*

Over 115 million people visited the emergency room in 2005. The CDC reported that about 21% of patients needed to be seen within 1 to 2 hours of their arrival (semi-urgent) and approximately 14% of patients needed to be seen within 2 to 24 hours (non-urgent). These unnecessary visits to overcrowded ERs could be treated more efficiently at a walk-in clinic.

For many illnesses and injuries, an urgent care center is the more appropriate place to go. Patients will see trained nurses and physicians and will most often be seen much quicker than in an emergency department.

#### When to visit the ER:

- Severe bleeding
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain or pressure
- Broken bones
- Partial or total amputation of a limb
- Trauma or injury to the head
- Sudden dizziness or difficulty seeing
- Severe abdominal pain



#### When to visit the urgent care facility:

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



#### *Don't have a Primary Care Doctor yet?*

Urgent care facilities are also an important resource for individuals who may not have an established doctor-patient relationship. An example would be a new resident who has overtaxed him/herself during a move thus come down with a cold or flu or who sprains an ankle while moving furniture into a new home. An urgent care clinic will see that patient while some physicians may be unable to accept new patients.

#### *Extended Hours*

Another benefit to an urgent care facility is their extended hours. Most are open later in the evening and on weekends. And for those people who realize they need a medication refill on the weekend, the urgent care physician can also order refills in most cases.

#### *Insurance Coverage*

You are covered for urgent care. Examples of urgent care include fever, earache, sore throat, sprained ankle, vomiting or diarrhea. Urgent care services are covered when received from a licensed health care professional or facility and the services are a covered benefit under your plan. You would pay your co-pay for a visit to the urgent care center.

**Important: Urgent care centers are not equipped to handle life-threatening emergencies and are not a replacement for the emergency department.**

#### **EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT CARE**

Emergency care deals with serious illness or injury – conditions severe enough to require immediate medical attention. An emergency medical condition means a medical condition that makes itself obvious by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain, psychiatric disturbances and/or substance abuse) such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in:

- Placing the health of the individual (or, with respect to a pregnant woman, the health of the woman or her unborn child) in serious jeopardy, or

- Serious impairment to bodily functions, or
- Serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part
- Serious disfigurement

With respect to a pregnant woman who is having contractions, emergency medical condition means:

- That there is inadequate time to effect a safe transfer to another hospital before delivery, or
- That the transfer may pose a threat to the health or safety of the woman or the unborn child.

If you come to the hospital and request emergency services, you have the legal right to receive a medical screening examination within the capability of the hospital to determine whether an emergency medical condition exists. If an emergency medical condition does exist, you have the right to receive the care and treatment necessary to relieve or eliminate the condition. If the emergency department does not have the service capacity to treat the emergency medical condition, you have the right to an appropriate transfer to another facility.



Because medical emergencies occur suddenly and unexpectedly, hospital emergency departments have to maintain 24-hour staffing and have available state-of-the-art diagnostic and treatment equipment. The doctors, nurses and technicians are highly trained in emergency and trauma care to provide rapid assessment and treatment of any patient with a medical emergency.

Emergency care is appropriate when you have:

- Unusually severe symptoms that you believe to be an emergency
- Life-threatening illness or injury
- A minor emergency but do not have access to a doctor or walk-in care center

#### *Insurance Coverage*

You are always covered day and night in the case of an emergency, no matter where you are in the world. Preauthorization is not required for emergencies. Typically, your co-pay for a visit to the ER is \$75, which would be waived if you were admitted to the hospital. Follow these steps if you think you need emergency care:

1. Call the local emergency hotline – such as 911 – or go to the nearest emergency facility.
2. If you are admitted to an inpatient facility, you or someone on your behalf should notify Aetna as soon as reasonably possible.

Aetna reviews the bill and other information provided by you or the facility after your treatment. If you received care in an emergency facility for something that does not meet the emergency criteria, Aetna may pay less, meaning you'll end up paying more. So, it's important to know how an emergency is defined.

**Keep in mind that the cost of going to a walk-in clinic is significantly lower than the cost of visiting the ER, so if your situation is not an acute life-threatening illness or injury you should go to the walk-in clinic instead.**