

Where to Turn

In a health emergency, knowing your options can save time—and lives

Lots of injuries and illnesses—from stomachaches to fevers to twisted ankles—warrant treatment. But sometimes it can be tough to figure out where to seek help. These guidelines can point you in the right direction.



➔ WHEN TO CALL 911

If a condition seems life-threatening, call 911. “Don’t try to drive yourself or someone else to the emergency department [ED] if a life is in danger,” says James D’Etienne, M.D., medical director of emergency services at Baylor Medical Center at Waxahachie.

➔ WHEN TO GO TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

The ED is the place to turn for serious situations, when you need help right away. According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, you should head to the emergency department for:

- Any trouble breathing
- Pain or pressure in your chest
- Feeling faint, dizzy or weak
- Severe pain that comes on suddenly
- Bleeding that doesn’t stop
- Excessive vomiting or diarrhea
- Bringing up blood when you cough or vomit
- Feeling suicidal
- Having trouble speaking
- Vision changes
- Mental status changes
- Unusual abdominal pain

➔ WHEN TO VISIT URGENT CARE

Urgent care centers are springing up in many locations. For less-serious conditions, they provide care comparable to what’s offered in the ED, often with shorter waits. “They can be the place to turn if you need care on nights, weekends and holidays when your doctor’s office is closed,” says Ronald Jensen, D.O., medical director of the emergency department and vice president of medical affairs at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine.

These centers are generally a good choice for many conditions, including:

- Non-life-threatening allergic reactions
- Allergies and asthma
- Bronchitis
- Minor burns
- Congestion
- Coughs
- Earaches and ear infections
- Fever
- Flu
- Migraines
- Rashes
- Sinus infections
- Sore throat
- Stomachaches
- Fractures
- Cuts/stitches
- Sprains and strains

➔ WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

If your doctor’s office is open, he or she can treat most of the conditions that would otherwise send you to an urgent care center. With any non-life-threatening health concern, it’s often good to call your primary care physician.

“But if you think it’s an emergency, especially if you have chest pain, difficulty breathing, stroke-like symptoms or trauma, the ED is open 24/7,” Dr. D’Etienne says. “If you don’t feel it’s an emergency, and it can wait, you may prefer to call your doctor and make an appointment.”

Many doctors will return your call even outside of normal office hours and can recommend a home treatment, an office visit, or tell you if a trip to an urgent care center or ED is necessary once you describe your symptoms. ●