When to Go to the Emergency Department and What to Expect

For Parents/Caregivers & Self-Advocates

Common Reasons to Go to the Emergency Department

- Wheezing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.
- Chest pain.
- Fractures.
- Fainting or dizziness.
- Sudden numbness or weakness.
- Bleeding that can't be stopped.
- Abdominal pain - especially intense, localized (in one spot).
- Fever with convulsions or any fever in children under 3 months.
- Confusion or changes in mental status.
- Coughing or vomiting blood.
- Severe headache or head injury, especially on aspirin or blood thinners.
- Blood in the urine or bloody diarrhea.
- Sudden inability to speak, see, walk, or move.

Extra Screening Due to COVID-19

- You will be asked if you have a fever, cough, or have had contact with anyone with COVID-19.
- You will have your temperature checked.
- A facemask will be provided if you don't have one.
- You may be asked to go back to your private vehicle or waiting room until a bed is ready.

The Emergency Department Routine

Triage: A nurse will evaluate the seriousness of your illness or injury.

- They will check your temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, and ask questions.
- You may be sent back to your private vehicle or to the waiting room until a bed is ready.
- Tell a nurse if you have difficulty with overstimulating environments or long waits.
- Ask if they have a quieter area for minor illnesses/injuries to help you to be seen ASAP.
- Inform the nurse of any special communication needs.

Registration: How a medical record is made of your visit.

- Have a photo identification card and your medical insurance card with you.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form for treatment and payment responsibility.

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The Emergency Department Routine *(continued)*

Examination: Staff will prepare you to be seen by the doctor.

- Blood tests, x-rays, or other tests may be taken at this time.
- The nurse and doctor will do the best they can to relieve your pain as soon as possible.
- Sometimes medication can only be given after tests or X-rays have been completed.
- X-rays are first looked at by an emergency doctor and also read by a radiologist.

Long Wait Times: There are many reasons I may have to wait.

- Critically ill or injured patients need immediate treatment, even if they arrived after you.
- Lab and/or X-ray has been called to perform a procedure to help evaluate your condition. Lab tests are highly complicated and take time to complete.
- A specialty room is needed for your treatment.

Family and Caregivers: What if I need help?

If you need your family or caregiver to help you communicate, you tell the nurse during triage and registration.

Discharge: When care is complete.

- Staff will provide you with written and verbal instructions.
- If it's necessary for you to be admitted to the hospital, your ED physician will coordinate with your doctor or one of the hospital's in-house doctors.

Billing: You may need to pay your co-pay before you leave.

You should have money or a debit or credit card with you to make this payment.

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