

Is this an emergency?

Not every medical situation requires a visit to the emergency room. Waiting until the next day to see your doctor or going to an urgent care facility will often take care of a problem.

How do you recognize an emergency?

An emergency is when someone will suffer significant harm or possible death unless they receive prompt care. That's when you call 911 or go immediately to the emergency room for help.

If you have questions about whether your situation is an emergency, call your primary care physician. Most primary care physicians offer after-hours service by phone, so you can talk to them or another doctor or nurse.

Problems that can be managed by a primary care physician or a visit to an urgent care center include:

- Earaches
- Minor cuts where bleeding is controlled
- Minor dog or animal bites where bleeding is controlled; do see your doctor immediately because a rabies shot may be required
- Sprains
- Sunburns or minor burns from cooking
- Insect stings or delayed swelling from a sting; however, if there is breathing difficulty, go to the emergency room
- Skin rashes
- Fever; however, if there is a convulsion or extreme fever in a child, go to the emergency room
- Colds, cough, sore throat or flu



911

What if it is an emergency?



Problems that should be considered an emergency include:

- Loss of consciousness
- Signs of a heart attack that last two minutes or longer, which include chest pain or chest pain radiating to the left arm
- Signs of a stroke, which include sudden onset of numbness in any extremity and elevated blood pressure
- Bleeding that does not stop after 10 minutes of direct pressure
- Sudden, severe pain
- Poisoning
- A severe or worsening reaction to an insect bite or sting, or to a medication, especially if breathing is affected
- A major injury, such as a head injury
- Unexplained stupor, drowsiness or disorientation
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Severe shortness of breath
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings
- Anything else you reasonably believe may be an emergency

Be prepared for emergencies, especially if you have children, by following these simple tips:

- Keep a well-stocked first aid kit in your house and car that includes up-to-date medical history forms for everyone in the family.
- Keep a list of prescriptions and over-the-counter medications that you and your children are taking as well as the dosages. If you rely on caregivers to watch your children, make sure they have medical consent-to-treat forms so your caregivers can get treatment for your children should an emergency arise.

Learn to prevent emergencies:

- Always wear a seat belt and use an approved child seat for children riding in a vehicle.
- Do not drink and drive.
- Make sure your child is wearing a helmet and other protective gear when riding a bike, roller skating or participating in any other physically active sport.
- Visit your doctor for regular checkups and keep your child's immunizations up to date.
- Learn the signs of serious illness.
- Put safety first.