

Urgent Care: Know Where and When to Go

The general public can confuse urgent care with emergency care

In many ways the Urgent Care Center (UCC) is similar in some of the scopes of practice of your primary care physician, but differs in that typically the UCC can provide X-rays on-site, provide laceration repairs for minor injuries, and can do minor casting. Depending on the staffing model, some may be capable of offering simple blood tests and intravenous fluids, however, you should always call ahead to find out the scope of services that are provided. Remember, the UCC is not a substitute for your primary care provider and medication refills are solely at the discretion of the provider. Do not assume that narcotics can be refilled by visiting an Urgent Care Center. Most often the provider may not elect to provide refills of this class of drug, and you should not fault the provider if they do not.

Urgent Care Centers are open for extended hours, in general 12 hours a day on average, and on weekends with hours depending on patient volumes and location. Typically you can be seen quicker at the Urgent Care Center for minor ailments than in the hospital emergency department with a much lower co-pay and other inherent costs such as facility fees that raise costs.

It is important to be aware that UCCs are not equipped to handle serious conditions. A number of medical conditions for which you should consider seeking care in the Emergency Department are listed below:

- ✓ Chest pain, especially if it radiates to the arm or jaw or associated with any sweating, nausea, vomiting or difficulty in breathing or if you simply “want to get your heart checked”
- ✓ Severe heart palpitations
- ✓ Severe abdominal pain or abdominal pain with fever
- ✓ Sudden difficulty in speaking or difficulty in understanding speech
- ✓ Sudden onset of headaches
- ✓ Loss of balance with clumsiness
- ✓ Altered mental status
- ✓ Weakness on one side of the body
- ✓ Sudden testicular pain and or swelling
- ✓ Newborn baby less than 4 months old with a fever
- ✓ Deep lacerations of the face or oral cavity
- ✓ Head injury with possible loss of consciousness
- ✓ High fevers with a rash
- ✓ Vaginal bleeding with or without pregnancy
- ✓ Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- ✓ Severe burns
- ✓ Seizures without a previous diagnosis of epilepsy
- ✓ Dehydration
- ✓ Motor vehicle accident with airbag deployment
- ✓ Falls that occur with bleeding while on blood-thinning medications

****Please note this list is a suggestive list and cannot be used in a medical-legal discourse or cited for any purpose. Conditions and centers vary in addition presentations may not be obvious on initial evaluation. ****