

It's not always easy to know if a medical problem needs emergency care at an Emergency Department. In some situations, emergency medical treatment is a must. Other conditions and services such as prescription renewals are best dealt with by your family doctor or at a local medical clinic.

Understanding how an Emergency Department works may help you decide if you need to go there. If you think it's an emergency or urgent, don't hesitate. Trust your judgement.

Don't forget to bring your:

- Nova Scotia Health Card
- Medications you are taking (including herbal remedies)

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

Whether you arrive by ambulance or on your own, a triage nurse or paramedic will ask you several questions and perform a few simple procedures to assess your condition. This will help them decide how urgently you need to be seen by a doctor. This process is known as triage. Examples include:

LIFE THREATENING

Heart attack, major trauma, severe head injury or amputation.

EMERGENCY

Severe difficulty breathing (due to an allergic reaction, asthma or other causes), unconsciousness or severe bleeding.

URGENT

Head injury, deep cut, foreign body in the eyes or ears, high fever in an infant or toddler, chest pain (not related to a known heart problem) or signs of serious infection.

LESS URGENT

Possible fracture/sprain, depression, back pain, skin/wound infection or headaches (migraines).

NOT URGENT

Colds or flu, minor cuts or bumps, bites, sore throat, sinus problems, dressing changes or prescription renewals.

WORST COMES FIRST

Patients are seen by a doctor in order of need. Emergency care is not provided on a first-come first-served basis. How long you will wait can depend on:

- How urgently you need care.
- How busy the Emergency Department is when you arrive.
- How urgently others in the Emergency Department need care, including those arriving by ambulance.
- Once you have been assessed it may be necessary for you to have further tests (e.g.: x-rays or lab tests) or be seen by a specialist.



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

- Go to your family doctor – your doctor knows your medical history and can provide you with the best follow-up care. Your community pharmacist may offer advice on non-urgent medical matters.
- Make sure that you and your family have enough prescribed medication, especially over holidays and weekends.
- If you have a chronic illness keep your regularly scheduled appointments with your doctor. Ask your doctor what changes in your medical condition would require urgent medical attention.



Here are other things you can do to stay healthy and help avoid a trip to the Emergency Department:

- Get a flu shot each year.
- Keep your vaccinations up-to-date.
- Don't smoke.
- Wear your seat belt and drive carefully.
- Wear safety equipment at work and play.
- Protect yourself from the sun.
- Wash your hands often.
- Don't drink and drive

THIS INFORMATION BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Annapolis Valley Health
Cape Breton District Health Authority
Capital Health
Colchester East Hants Health Authority
Cumberland Health Authority
Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority
IWK Health Centre
Nova Scotia Department of Health
Nova Scotia Emergency Nurses Association
Pictou County Health Authority
South Shore Health
South West Nova District Health Authority

EMERGENCY CARE

*There for you
when you need it*

