



Urgent Care Vs. Emergency Room: Where to go

This guide was produced in collaboration with Association of Black Women’s Physicians (ABWP).

Did an out-of-the-blue injury or illness just happen? Do you need to be seen by a medical provider? When these situations occur, we’re often faced with uncertainty about where to go for care, especially if our regular doctor’s office is closed or unavailable and we need immediate assistance. While the answer isn’t simple, knowing the difference between emergency care and urgent care could save your life in a medical emergency. Nonprofit Transamerica Institute has partnered with the ABWP to give you guidance on where to seek treatment for your symptoms.

Call 911 in a life-threatening situation

For certain medical emergencies calling 911 for an ambulance is the right decision. This is because paramedics often can begin delivering life-saving treatment on the way to the hospital.

Emergency Room

Hospital emergency departments provide care at any time—night or day. They are equipped and staffed for even the most complex or critical needs, including life-threatening situations ranging from heart attack to traumatic injuries. If you visit an urgent care center with a medical emergency, they may not be equipped with the tools necessary to treat you, which could be devastating if you find yourself in a time-sensitive situation.

Urgent Care

Urgent care centers, or walk-in clinics, provide care for non-emergency illness or injury. For instance, if you’re unable to see your doctor, urgent care centers handle a variety of medical problems that need to be treated right away but are not considered emergencies. There are also telehealth urgent care visits for those who prefer to stay in the comfort of their home. Telehealth includes live videoconferencing with providers or telephone-only consultations.

ABWP offers these examples of when to visit the emergency room versus urgent care (see next page):

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT WHERE TO GO?

WHEN TO GO TO URGENT CARE



Minor injuries

Fever or flu symptoms



Minor sprains or strains

Upper respiratory tract infection



Urinary tract infection

Skin rashes

WHEN TO GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM



Uncontrolled bleeding

Chest pain



Acute respiratory distress

Medication overdose



Large open wounds

Severe head injury

CALL 911 IN THE CASE OF A LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY



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