



## WRITING SAMPLE

Publication: GateHouse Media

Publish date: March 2019

---

# Emergency Room, Primary Doctor or Urgent Care? Here's How to Tell

By Gretchen Heber

In a medical emergency, your only concern is getting immediate help, and you will likely race to the nearest medical center without much thought. But in calmer moments, it might be prudent to consider which type of health care facility is best for particular health issues. You don't want to risk inadequate care, overpaying or facing a long wait by going to the wrong type of facility.

### When to visit an emergency room

There's no question: if you're experiencing life-threatening symptoms or have experienced life-threatening injuries, get to an emergency room. Reasons to immediately call 911 or go to the ER include:

- Seizures
- Unconsciousness
- Paralysis
- Trauma
- Very high fever (especially in children)
- Severe chest or abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Allergic reaction
- Persistent vomiting
- Suspected poisoning
- Unexplained rash
- Severe head or eye injury
- Vaginal bleeding with pregnancy

Many of these concerns are too tricky to risk any type of medical help other than what the well-staffed and well-supplied emergency department at a hospital can offer.

Hospital or standalone emergency centers are generally the most expensive healthcare options, however, so if your symptoms fall outside of life-threatening category, you might want to consider an alternative.

### **When urgent care is best**

The services provided by an urgent care center and your primary care office can overlap quite a bit. Often the determining factor as to which makes sense is time. If you need to see someone as quickly as possible — but it's not life-threatening — usually an urgent care clinic makes more sense, as doctors' offices don't always have same-day appointments available.

For example, if you suspect a sprained ankle or broken bone, but your life is not in danger, visit an urgent care facility. Same for a laceration that most likely requires stitches, but not surgery, and is not a life-or-death injury.

If you simply don't feel well, and don't want to wait to a day or two see your primary care doctor, urgent care will be able to help you. Your reasons for visiting urgent care might include mild to moderate fevers, flu or cold symptoms, ear infections, bronchitis, asthma, allergies or gastrointestinal issues. You might also visit an urgent care center for minor back pain, urinary tract infections or for insect or animal bites.

Urgent care centers can also administer flu shots, perform strep tests and renew prescriptions. Some urgent care clinics do walk-in school or work physicals, too, at a fairly affordable flat rate.

### **Primary care**

You can also, of course, visit your regular doctor for many of the complaints detailed above in the urgent care section, if you don't mind waiting a day or two. Your primary care facility is more than capable of treating your cold or stomach bug, or helping you get your allergies under control.

But more importantly, a reason to utilize your primary care office when possible is the importance of the relationship you develop with your physician and his or her office. Over time, your health care team gets to know you and your medical issues, and that can be important in the management of your overall health. Furthermore, there's something to be said for central management of your health records.

It's definitely most effective to rely on your primary care physician for help and guidance managing chronic health issues and long-term medications.

### **Be prepared**

When thinking about all this, the most important consideration is to have given these options some thought ahead of time, so when illness or injury strikes, you're prepared and have a plan in mind. It's a good idea to have a list of nearby emergency centers, so in an emergency situation, when all you can think about is a loved one's health, you won't be trying to figure out where to go.