Where To Go When You Get Sick

Depending on your illness, you may need different types of care. The information below can help you understand where to go.

If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to an emergency room. Note: This will likely be more expensive than seeing a Primary Care Provider.

If your problem is not an emergency but you think you should get health care before your PCP's office opens again, call your PCP's office. If they are closed, their after-hours phone service can tell you if you need health care right away. If you do, they can also tell you the best place to go.

If you decide to visit an urgent care clinic, call first to make sure they take your health insurance. Be sure to ask about an interpreter if you need one.

Why do I need a PCP?

- Having a PCP will save you money. Services at your PCP are less expensive.
- Having a PCP will save you time. Making an appointment means you have time slotted just for you, and you won't have to wait for others to be seen.
- A PCP can help you be healthier. As your PCP gets to know more about your health, he or she can help you create a plan to manage your health.

How do I get a PCP if I do not have one?

Get a list of PCPs who take your health insurance. This is called a provider directory. Call the number on the back of your insurance card or visit the web site listed on your insurance card to find a provider directory.

Ask your friends and family members who their PCP is.

Select a PCP who is close to where you live or work. This will make it easier for you to get to and from appointments.

Call the office of the PCP you want to see. Have your insurance information handy. It is on the front of your health insurance card, and be sure to ask the doctor's office if they accept your insurance.

If you have questions about your health care, contact your Primary Care Provider or your Health Insurance Provider.

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Primary Care vs. Urgent Care vs. Emergency Department

Use these tips to help you decide where to go when you need health care. When you go to the right place, you get the health care you need, and you can save time and money.

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Primary Care Provider (PCP)

This is the provider who takes care of you the most. It may be a doctor, physician assistant (PA), or advanced practice nurse (APN or APRN).

Reasons to visit your PCP include:

- For a wellness check once each year. There is no cost for this, and your PCP can do a lot to help keep you healthy.

- When you have a minor injury or an illness that just started. Your PCP can find out what is causing your health problem and get you the help you need.

- When you have certain chronic or long-term illnesses. Your PCP can track how you are doing over time and help keep your illness from getting worse.

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Urgent Care Provider

Urgent Care Clinics can treat you for minor health problems. These are things like fever, flu symptoms, minor cuts, sprains, or burns. There are problems that need care right away but are not emergencies.

Reasons to visit an urgent care clinic:

- You are not able to get an appointment with your PCP
  - After hours
  - When the office is closed for a holiday
  - No appointments are available

- You do not have a PCP

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Emergency Department

Emergency Departments (also known as Emergency Rooms or ERs) are hospital areas that can treat you for an emergency. An emergency is a problem that, without health care right away, you would expect to:

- Put your health in serious danger
- Have serious problems with how your body works
- Have serious damage to a part of your body

Some examples of emergencies:
- Serious car accident
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Difficulty breathing
- Broken bone(s)
- Serious cuts or wounds with bleeding that won't stop

Remember: Any time you are sick, as long as it is not an emergency, try to see your Primary Care Provider first. This can help you save time and money.

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