

Health Care in Ontario: Getting Emergency Care

If you have a life-threatening medical emergency, go to a hospital emergency room or call 9-1-1 immediately. The 911 operator can get an interpreter for you, if you need one.

A hospital is only one place to get emergency care. Sometimes people go there because they don't know where else to go. To help you understand all your choices, you'll find information here on:

- Where to get help for urgent but non-life threatening problems
- Where to get help for life threatening problems

You can find this fact sheet online in more languages at www.ontario.ca/healthcarebasics. Click on the "Information in Other Languages" button. The online version will also give you links to learn more about getting medical care in Ontario.

Where to get help for urgent but non-life threatening problems

1. Who can help me if I'm sick or injured and not sure what to do?

Call [Telehealth Ontario](http://www.ontario.ca/telehealth) at 1-866-797-0000. This is a free, confidential phone service that you can call any time, night or day. You can get health advice or general health information from a nurse. The nurse will help you decide if you should:

- take care of yourself at home
- make an appointment with your doctor
- go to a clinic
- go to a hospital emergency room

2. Where do I go if I need help fast, but my problem is not life-threatening?

Call your family doctor, Family Health Team or Nurse Practitioner Clinic to see if you can be seen without an appointment or during extended hours. If you don't have a family doctor, you may want to visit a walk-in clinic. This chart sums up your choices.

If you have an urgent problem like this:	Get help here:	How they can help:
Flu, coughs and colds, minor injuries, and more long-standing medical problems	A family doctor or walk-in clinic	They may see you without an appointment during regular or extended hours
Eye injuries, wounds, broken limbs, X-rays and laboratory tests.	Urgent Care Centre	You can get help 24 hours a day, including weekends, without an appointment

3. How do I find a doctor or other health care provider?

Sign up for **Health Care Connect**. You can [register for this free service online](#) or call 1-800-445-1822. Make sure you have a valid card for the **Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)**. You can [learn more about OHIP](#) online.

4. Where do I go if I have an urgent medical problem that my family doctor cannot treat?

Go to [your nearest walk-in clinic or Urgent Care Centre](#). Or, call your Family Health Team if you are enrolled in one. You can get help during the day, in the evening and on weekends. These centres can help with problems like eye injuries, wounds, broken limbs, X-rays and laboratory tests. You don't need an appointment – just go in if you need help. And don't forget to bring your OHIP card with you.

Where to get help for life threatening problems

5. When should I go to a hospital emergency room?

An emergency room is also called an ER. An ER provides urgent medical and surgical care to patients at a hospital. You would only go to an ER for a potentially life-threatening illness or injury. You can [find an emergency room online](#).

6. Can I call an ambulance to take me to an emergency room (ER)?

Ontario provides air and land ambulance services for the most urgent health emergencies. Ambulances can bring you to the ER quickly and provide trained people to help you during the ride. On the road, their sirens clear a path through traffic by warning other cars to move out of the way.

If you need to take an ambulance to a hospital, the [Ontario Health Insurance Plan](#) (OHIP) will pay for most of the cost. You will have to pay a small fee (\$45).

Note: If the doctor who sees you at the hospital thinks that your ambulance ride was not medically necessary, you must pay \$240.

7. How do I call an ambulance?

To call an ambulance, dial 911 from any phone. The 911 operator can get an interpreter for you if you need one. They will ask you about your health problem and send an ambulance if you need one. Your call is free from any phone.

8. Do I need an OHIP card to use an emergency room (ER)?

In an emergency, hospitals will treat you without seeing your card first. But you will have to show your card later if you want the [Ontario Health Insurance Plan](#) (OHIP) to pay your hospital bills.

9. What happens when I visit an emergency room (ER)?

This is what will likely happen after you arrive:

- First, you need to sign in at the front desk of the ER. This lets staff know that you are there and what your problem is. If your medical problem needs immediate action, a nurse or doctor may see you right away.
- Next, you will see an ER nurse. This nurse makes sure that the sickest people get to see the doctors first.

- If you have to wait, you will likely be asked to sit down in the waiting area.
- Staff will call your name once an exam room is ready. The exam room will likely have a bed and a chair in it. It may also have some medical equipment. You may have to wait here awhile to see the doctor.
- When the doctor arrives, he or she will talk to you about your medical problem and check you over. At this point, the doctor will decide what should happen next. For instance, you may need an X-ray or a test. You may have to wait for your results.

Once the doctor knows more about your problem, you may be treated and sent home. Or, if your case more serious, you will stay at the hospital for further tests or treatment.

10. If I go to an emergency room (ER), how long will I have to wait?

Many things may affect how much time you will spend in an ER:

- How serious your condition is
- The time and day you go to the ER
- The size and location of the hospital you visit
- How busy the ER is due to things like major accidents or a flu outbreak
- If you need to stay in the hospital for surgery or other treatment

You can learn more about [hospital wait times](#) online.

11. I have questions about using the health care system in Ontario. Who can I call?

Contact ServiceOntario, INFOLine between 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. Staff will be able to help you in French, English and 20 other languages. Call:

- 1-866-532-3161
- TTY 1-800-387-5559
- In Toronto, TTY 416-327-4282