

When Your Child Needs Emergency Medical Services



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It is rare for children to become seriously ill with no warning. Depending on your child's symptoms, you usually should contact your child's pediatrician for advice. Early recognition and treatment of symptoms can prevent an illness or injury from getting worse or turning into an emergency.

What is an emergency?

An emergency is when you believe a severe injury or illness is threatening your child's health or may cause permanent harm. In these cases, a child needs emergency medical treatment right away.

Discuss with your child's pediatrician in advance what you should do and where you should go in case of an emergency.

Emergencies can result from medical or psychiatric illnesses or injuries. Your child may show any of the following signs:

- Acting strangely or becoming more withdrawn and less alert
- Unconsciousness or no response when you talk to your child
- Rhythmic jerking and loss of consciousness (a seizure)
- Increasing effort or trouble with breathing
- Skin or lips that look blue, purple, or gray
- Neck stiffness or a rash with fever
- Increasing or severe persistent pain
- A cut that is large, deep, or involves the head, chest, or abdomen
- Bleeding that does not stop after applying pressure for 5 minutes
- A burn that is large or involves the hands, feet, groin, chest, or face
- Any loss of consciousness, confusion, headache, or vomiting after a head injury

Many emergencies involve sudden injuries. These injuries often are caused by the following:

- Bicycle or car crashes
- Falls
- Burns or smoke inhalation
- Choking
- Near drowning

- Firearms or other weapons
- Electric shocks
- Poisoning*

*Call your poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 at once if your child has swallowed a suspected poison or another person's medication, even if your child has no signs or symptoms.

Call your pediatrician if you think your child is ill. Call 911 (or your local emergency number) for help if you are concerned that your child's life may be in danger or that your child is seriously ill or injured.

In addition, every parent should be prepared. Part of that preparation includes learning CPR and basic first aid. For classes near you, contact your pediatrician, the American Red Cross, or the American Heart Association.

In case of an emergency

- Stay calm.
- Start rescue breathing or CPR if your child is not breathing.
- Call 911 if you need immediate help. If you do not have 911 service in your area, call your local emergency ambulance service or county emergency medical service. Most cell phones can reach 911, but you will have to tell the operator where you are.
- Apply continuous pressure to the site of bleeding with a clean cloth.
- Place your child on the floor with her head and body turned to the side if she is having a seizure. Do not put anything in her mouth.
- Do not move your injured child unless he is in immediate danger (for example, from a fire).
- Stay with your child until help arrives.

Bring any medication your child is taking with you to the hospital. Also bring any suspected poisons or other medications your child might have taken.

After you arrive at the emergency department, make sure you tell the emergency staff the name of your child's pediatrician. Your pediatrician can work closely with the emergency department doctors and nurses and can provide them with more information about your child.

Important Emergency Phone Numbers

Keep the following numbers posted on or near your phone:

YOUR HOME PHONE NUMBER AND ADDRESS

YOUR CHILD'S PEDIATRICIAN (Name, Phone, After-hours Phone)

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (AMBULANCE) PHONE (911 IN MOST AREAS)

POLICE PHONE (911 IN MOST AREAS)

FIRE DEPARTMENT PHONE (911 IN MOST AREAS)

1-800-222-1222

POISON CONTROL CENTER PHONE

PREFERRED HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

DENTIST (Name, Phone, After-hours Phone)

It is important that babysitters and child care providers have these numbers and know the following:

- How to dial 911 or your local emergency number
- Whether 911 can be reached from a cell phone in your area
- Your home address (directions to your home) and phone number (an emergency operator would ask for this)
- Location of a spare car safety seat
- Location of the child's EIF and key rescue medications (such as an inhaler) in the home
- The phone number and address where parents can be located
- A neighbor who could respond to an emergency

Remember, for nonemergency conditions, first call your child's pediatrician. If you believe that an injury or illness is threatening your child's health or may cause permanent harm, call for an ambulance. If your child is seriously ill or injured, it is safer for your child to be transported to the emergency department by ambulance.

If your child has special care needs, it is important to have an Emergency Information Form (EIF) or similar form that describes the special health care needs of your child for emergency care providers. This form is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) and the American College of Emergency Physicians (www.acep.org). Attach this form to the emergency information above and give it to the first emergency care person to see your child.

From Your Doctor

The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on the individual facts and circumstances.

American Academy of Pediatrics

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