

Where to Go for Care: Urgent Care, Primary Care, or Emergency Room?

Keep this guide handy, so you know your options and where to go for the right care.



Urgent Care: for an urgent illness or injury that needs attention today



Extended hours, including evenings, weekends, and holidays.



Varies, but typically waits are much shorter than in emergency rooms. Some clinics, like Saddleback, publish times and offer online check-in.



Much less than an ED visit, even with insurance, but more than primary care.



Primary Care: for most medical needs that are not urgent or emergent



Limited hours. Typically only during weekday business hours.



The shortest wait if you have an appointment, however you may have to wait a day or two for one.



Primary care is usually the least expensive option.



Emergency Department: for serious and life-threatening medical conditions and injuries



Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



Wait times can vary significantly. Life-threatening and serious conditions are seen first, so wait times can be up to several hours for other conditions.



Even a short emergency room visit can be expensive, and most insurances charge a higher co-pay.

Urgent Care Conditions Treated

- Coughs, colds, and flu
- Sinus and respiratory infections
- Sore throat
- Pink eye
- Headache/migraine
- Urinary tract infection
- Cuts, burns, and rashes
- Sprains and fractures
- Sports and work injuries
- Ear infection
- Animal bites
- X-rays and limited lab tests
- Sports and camp physicals

Primary Care Conditions Treated

- Non-urgent conditions listed left
- Yearly visits and physical exams
- Specialist referrals for non-urgent issues
- Chronic condition management such as hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc.
- Vaccinations
- Medication refill
- Counseling for smoking cessation, weight management, etc.

Emergency Department Conditions

- Any severe/life-threatening conditions
- Heart attack or shortness of breath
- Stroke: face droop, arm weakness, speech difficulty
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Disorientation/severe vision impairment
- Seizures
- Overdose
- Severe burns
- Snake bites
- Severe head injury
- Shock or trauma
- Severe allergic reaction
- Intravenous or infusion therapy