



Hospital emergency departments in Rhode Island are currently very crowded. Children and adults in emergency departments with less serious health issues are experiencing long wait times. If you or your child does not need emergency medical care, please do not go to the emergency department. Long waits in the emergency department are frustrating, and they expose you and your family to new sicknesses.

Other places for medical care

Many health issues can be treated more quickly and effectively by a primary care provider, in an urgent care facility, or in a health center. Lists of primary care providers, urgent care centers, and health centers can be found at health.ri.gov/rightplace.

The health issues often best treated in these settings include back pain, sprains, minor cuts, colds, sore throat, low-grade fevers, and most cases of norovirus (sometimes called “the stomach flu”).

When to seek emergency medical care

Some health issues need emergency medical care (either by calling 911 or going to the emergency department). Examples include trouble breathing; persistent chest pain; new difficulty speaking or confusion; inability to wake or stay awake; heavy bleeding; deep wounds; serious burns; possible broken bones (especially if the bone is pushing through the skin); and severe allergic reactions.

This is not a complete list of health issues that require emergency medical care. For more information, see health.ri.gov/rightplace.

More information

If someone is not sure if they need to go to the emergency department, they should contact a primary care provider. A primary care provider will be able to provide guidance about the next best step. (Most offices have healthcare providers on-call after hours.) For people without primary care providers or insurance, RIDOH has information posted at health.ri.gov/rightplace.

Steps to prevent illness

All families should take the following steps to prevent serious illness:

- Get your flu shot. Everyone older than six months of age should be vaccinated every year.
- Be up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations. For most people, that means getting a booster.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Keep children home from daycare or school who have fever, especially with a cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, congestion, runny nose, or sore throat, until they are fever-free for 24 hours without medications that reduce fever.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work, and school.