

When is it time to visit the emergency room?

Instead of choosing and using a primary care physician, an estimated 15 percent of Americans use the hospital emergency room (ER) as their primary care provider. In visiting the ER, these individuals consume a valuable health resource meant for more urgent health issues.

Here are a few examples of when you should absolutely go to your nearest ER:

- Loss of consciousness
- Signs of heart attack — pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest; tightness, burning or aching under the breastbone; chest pain with light-headedness
- Signs of stroke — sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body; sudden dimness or loss of vision; loss of speech or understanding speech; sudden, severe headaches with no known cause; unexplained dizziness or sudden falls
- Severe shortness of breath
- Bleeding that does not stop after 10 minutes of direct pressure
- Sudden, severe pain
- A broken bone
- A severe or worsening reaction to an insect bite or sting, or to a medication, especially if breathing is difficult
- A major injury, such as a head trauma
- Fever-induced convulsion

- Suspected poisoning — check first with the Missouri Regional Poison Center at SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center at **314-772-5200**
- Unexplained stupor, drowsiness or disorientation
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings

If it is not a medical emergency, you should first schedule a visit with your primary care physician. Here are some examples:

- Earaches
- Minor cuts where bleeding is controlled
- A minor animal bite where bleeding is controlled
- A sprain
- Sunburn or minor burn from cooking
- A skin rash
- Low-grade fever
- Colds and cough, sore throat or flu.

If you don't have a primary care physician, call **314-SSM-DOCS** and we'll help you find a doctor who's right for you and your family. ■