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FAMILY LIFE

Urgent Care: Is It Worth the No Wait?

The best place for children to receive medical care is at a pediatrician's office. But, sometimes kids don't wait for office hours to get sick or injured. So, what should you do for those times when your baby runs a high fever during the night or your young athlete hurts his wrist at a weekend practice? It happens.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0629>) that in cases like these, you should never hesitate to call your pediatrician's office first, even if you know the office is closed. Pediatricians are very accustomed to taking phone calls at all times—day and night—and can often deal with problems over the phone. You are not bothering your pediatrician by calling.



However, you may notice new facilities popping up in your neighborhood that advertise that they offer "urgent" care services often with no appointments necessary. Before going to one of these clinics, the AAP recommends that your first step be to call your pediatrician's office—your child's "medical home"—to discuss your child's needs. If your pediatrician is unable to see you but believes your child should be examined, he or she will advise you on the most appropriate place for your child to receive care and how quickly your child should be seen.

Types of Urgent Care Services:

- **Urgent care and nonemergency hospital-based acute care:** These facilities handle medical issues that may not require a visit to the emergency room but still deserve attention. They are often open after-hours and on weekends. Keep in mind that the physicians and nurses who work at these centers may not have advanced training in pediatrics and may not be comfortable treating infants and young children. Urgent care facilities are generally considered a higher level of care than retail-based clinics.
- **Retail-based clinics (RBCs):** These clinics are typically found inside supermarkets, pharmacies and retail superstores. While they may seem convenient, they generally provide a very limited number of health care services for adults and children. Nurse practitioners or physician assistants—often trained in family practice but with limited pediatric training—typically staff RBCs; there is usually not a physician on site.

AAP Recommendation for Children Under 2:

The management of acute care for children under age 2 requires special expertise. Therefore, the AAP does not recommend RBCs, telehealth services outside of the medical home, and those acute care services without pediatric expertise for children younger than 2 years.

If Your Child is Seen by Someone Other Than His or Her Pediatrician:

If your child is seen by someone other than his or her pediatrician—at one of the acute care services or clinics listed above—it is very important that you provide the clinic with accurate and complete medical information to receive the most appropriate care.

- Bring information to the clinic about whether your child's immunizations are up to date.

- Let the provider know if your child has any allergies to medications and list the medications your child is currently using (including the last dose) and medicines taken in the past.
- Don't forget to mention any conditions such as asthma, diabetes, etc.
- Request that information regarding the visit be sent to your pediatrician so he or she can maintain a complete picture of your child's care. If the clinic does not offer this service, be sure to get copies of the services your child received and share this information with your pediatrician as soon as possible.

Additional Information & Resources:

- Is It a Medical Emergency, or Not? (/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Is-It-a-Medical-Emergency-or-Not.aspx)
- 10 Things for Parents to Know Before Heading to the ER (/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/10-Things-for-Parents-to-Know-Before-Heading-to-the-ER.aspx)
- Nonemergency Acute Care: When It's Not the Medical Home (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0629>) (AAP Policy Statement)
- Guidelines for Care of Children in the Emergency Department (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/peds.2009-1807v1>) (AAP Policy Statement)
- Consent by Proxy for Non-Urgent Pediatric Care (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2016-3911>) (AAP Clinical Report)

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