

EMERGENCY! Or Is It?

The initial minutes after an injury or medical crisis are often the most critical. By knowing how to distinguish emergency, urgent and routine health concerns, you can help make emergency care as efficient and effective as possible. Trust your instincts when deciding if you or a loved one needs immediate medical attention.

We've prepared these guidelines to help you distinguish a true emergency from a medical problem that requires a regular doctor's visit.

Symptoms that generally indicate an emergency include:

Sudden changes in mental status

- Fainting or dizziness
- Hallucinations or sudden clouding of thoughts
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings
- Excessive sleepiness, fussiness, dizziness, confusion, or changes in mental abilities in babies or children

Trauma

- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Problems with movement or feeling after an injury
- Burns on the face or genitals; burns around the whole hand; burns that feel painless or numb; burns that are white, brown, black or charred
- Sunburn with nausea, vomiting, fever and chills
- Animal and human bites
- Broken bones
- Spinal (back or neck) injuries
- Poisoning or drug overdose
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest, jaw, shoulder, arm, or abdominal pain or pressure
- Sudden lack of coordination, numbness, weakness or loss of balance on one or both sides
- Difficulty speaking or understanding simple statements
- Sudden blurred or limited vision in one or both eyes
- Sudden, severe pain anywhere in the body
- Bulging or abnormally depressed fontanel (soft spot) in babies

Acute illnesses such as fever or flu

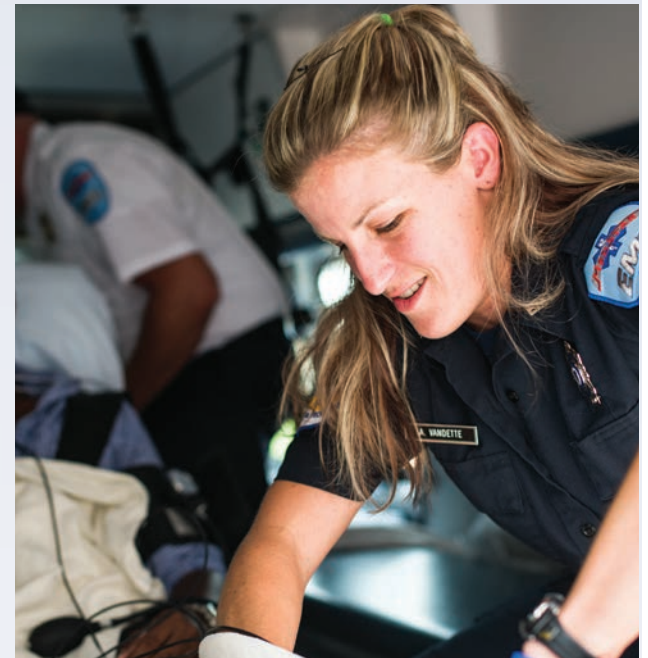
- Stiff neck with fever or headache
- Stupor or dazed behavior with a high fever
- Fever that doesn't come down with medications
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Coughing up or vomiting blood
- Bloody stools or bloody diarrhea in children

In an emergency situation, immediately call 911 for an ambulance. Paramedics can begin treatment on the way to the hospital. Don't attempt to move the victim or perform a medical procedure if you are unsure how to do it. And don't drive to the emergency room if you or the victim requires immediate care.

“Nashoba Valley Medical Center has streamlined the way things are done in its emergency department to ensure that patients receive quick, efficient, quality care,” says Scott Murray, MD, chief of the emergency department. “Improving ER wait times helps make an uncertain time less stressful, which enhances the lives of our patients and their families.”

We're Here if You Need Us – 24/7

The Nashoba Valley Medical Center emergency department team is here 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide you and your loved ones with emergency care should it become necessary. We have the shortest wait time of any emergency department in the region and we are a certified stroke facility.



Avoiding Unnecessary ER Visits

These steps can streamline your health care decision making—especially when you're trying to assess a possible medical emergency:

- **See a doctor when you're well.** When a problem arises, you'll have someone to call for medical advice before panicking.
- **Ask your doctor about symptoms for which you should be especially alert.** Your family history or personal health history may place you at higher risk for particular medical problems. Know when to call an ambulance and make sure your family knows, too. For example, if you have high blood pressure, learn which symptoms may signal a stroke or a heart attack. Likewise, if you have diabetes, be familiar with warning signs of dangerously low or high blood sugar levels. If you take medications, such as digoxin, know how to recognize symptoms of toxicity, and so forth.
- **Get your immunizations and attend to minor health problems as they arise.** In that way, for example, bronchitis won't develop into life-threatening pneumonia or strep throat into rheumatic fever.