

## WHEN SHOULD YOU GO TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT?

When my kids were little, they played out doors almost all day long, year round, just like the good ole' days. Bike riding (racing), swings, forts, sand box, Tonka trucks, playhouse and mud pies. They did it all. Yes, the good ole days of creating play time with the imagination. Little did we know *those* were the good ole days.

Aside from the usual bumps scrapes and bruises, they were pretty good at staying out of emergency situations, except for two times which required trips to the emergency room and some stitches – nothing life threatening, just a little scary for 3 and 4 years of age.

As parents, we want to make sure that we do the best we can to protect and take care of our children, so when an injury occurs, our first instinct is to assess if this requires a trip to the emergency room. The decision-making process still holds true as they grow older, and even as our adult family members become in need of medical attention. How do we know what constitutes a trip to the emergency room?



***The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) offers a list of warning signs that indicate a medical emergency:***

- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- Chest or upper abdominal pain or pressure
- Fainting, sudden dizziness, weakness
- Changes in vision
- Confusion or changes in mental status
- Any sudden or severe pain
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Suicidal feelings
- Difficulty speaking
- Shortness of breath
- Unusual abdominal pain

As stated by the ACEP, **children have unique medical problems and may display different symptoms than adults. Symptoms that are serious for a child may not be as serious for an adult.** Remember that children have a hard time communicating their condition, which means an adult will have to interpret the behavior. As a parent, that is always hard to do because children – even teens – just cannot seem to describe the pain. All they know is that it just hurts! Always get immediate medical attention if you think your child is having a medical emergency.

What the ACEP wants you to know that will help you get the best possible care as quickly as possible:

- **Bring a list of medications and allergies:**

What is the name of the medication you are taking? How often do you take it and for how long? Do not forget to include over-the-counter pills and any herbal medications. A list of allergies is important, especially if there are many of them. Be sure to include medications, foods, insects, or any other product that may cause an allergic reaction. Bring a medical history form with you. ACEP has medical forms available on its Web site:



<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/EmergencyManual/MedicalForms/Default.aspx>. Keeping a record of medications and allergies is something you should prepare ahead of time with extra copies on hand ready to take with you should you need to rush out to the emergency room.

- **Know your immunizations:** This will likely be a long list for children, mainly tetanus, flu and Hepatitis B for adults.
- **Remain calm:** Obviously, it is difficult to remain composed if you have been badly injured, but a calm attitude can help increase communication with the doctors and nurses who are caring for you. If it is your child that is injured, remaining calm is essential. Your child will look to you and feed off of your response. If they see that you are calm they will in turn stay calm and their anxiety level will remain lower.
- **Communication:** Communication is very important when you are in the emergency department. You will need to get across to the medical team as much information in the quickest way so the proper treatment can begin. Let them know if you are in pain, and if there have been any changes since you first walked in.

*I would like to add my own ~*

- **Patience:** This will probably be the hardest to master in an emergency room. Anyone who has experienced an emergency room wait knows that the clock seems to tick slower here than any other place on earth! However, the medical team sees numerous patients and realizes how the waiting experience can be.

They too feel your frustration and are doing their best to attend to each and every patient in a timely manner.

For more information on Childhood Student Emergencies, go to

<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/YourHealth/ChildhoodStudentEmergencies/Default.aspx?id=1723>

For information about Medic Alert, go to

<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/YourHealth/AboutEmergencies/Default.aspx?id=1490>

Should You Drive or Call an Ambulance? go to

<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/EmergencyManual/IsItAnEmergency/Default.aspx?id=130>