Emergency Department



Introduction

The Emergency Department (ED) is an important part of a hospital. It provides urgent care for people who are seriously ill or badly injured. In Australia, hospital emergency departments are open 24 hours a day. You do not need an appointment to attend.

This information helps you understand what happens when you visit an emergency department, what care you can expect, and how to be prepared. Knowing what to expect can help reduce stress and make sure you or your loved ones get the right help quickly.

What happens when you arrive at an Emergency Department (ED)?

People come to the emergency department when they need immediate medical care. When you arrive, someone will ask you why you are there, so they can

determine how quickly you need to see a clinician and start treatment.

If your condition is not urgent, you may be asked to see the administration (admin) staff first to register your details. They will ask your name, address, phone number, and your Medicare number.

Every patient is asked about their cultural background, and most frequently used language at home. This is to make sure you get everything you need while you are at the hospital. If English is your second language you can ask for a phone interpreter to support you.

The admin staff may ask you some additional questions, if you don't have the answer that's okay, let them know and they will do their best to help you. You may speak to more than one person during this time as the Emergency Department.

Admin staff can't give you medical advice, the triage nurse and emergency doctor will help you with treatment and medical advice when you see them.

You will then need to wait to for a 'triage' nurse to call your name. Make sure you are in the waiting room and can hear the triage nurse when they call for you.

> *The Emergency Department can be noisy and scary. Sometimes there are a lot of people there and you might see someone with a visible illness or injury. If you are feeling scared or unsafe speak to a hospital staff member who can support you while you are waiting for care.*

What is a Triage Nurse?

Triage nurses are specially trained nurses who assess your illness or injury when you arrive at the Emergency Department. Their job is to decide how urgently you or the person you are helping needs care.

The triage nurse will ask some questions to understand how best to help. They will confirm your name and date of birth and may ask about allergies, medicines you take, and whether you have been to hospital before.

Try to answer as honestly as you can, as this helps them decide what care you need.

Depending on why you have come to hospital, the nurse may need to ask personal or uncomfortable questions. These might include questions about going to the toilet, periods, sexual activity, or alcohol or drug use. These questions are a normal part of assessment and help the nurse make safe decisions about your care.

> *Triage nurses are safe and professional people to talk to. Nothing you say will embarrass them, and you will not get in trouble for your answers. They will speak to you respectfully and try to make you feel comfortable and safe.*

Your information is kept private and is usually only shared with the healthcare team looking after you. If you are aged 14 or older, your information will not be shared with your parents or others unless you agree. However, if the nurse is worried that you or someone else is at serious risk of harm, they may need to share information with other services, such as child protection or police, to keep people safe.

If you come to hospital with a parent or guardian and would prefer to speak to the nurse alone, you can ask to be seen privately. You can also ask for your information to remain confidential.

What do I need to know when I'm at the Emergency Department?

Let the triage nurse know if your symptoms get worse while you are waiting. This helps the nurse review your care and make sure patients are seen in the right order.

Many Emergency Departments have **Aboriginal Liaison Officers** who support First Nations patients. If you would like to speak with one, ask the triage nurse or administration staff.

Emergency Departments may also have a **Patient Experience Officer**, usually located in the waiting area. You can talk to them if you have questions about the ED process, feel unsure about waiting times, or need help such as food, support, or charging your phone.

If you are worried about your safety at home, someone is making you feel scared or unsafe, or you need food and a safe place to stay, tell the triage nurse and

treating staff. The healthcare team can connect you with services you need and help make sure you are safe.

> ***Tell the triage nurse if you don't have anywhere safe to stay or access to food or support. The nurse can help to get you in touch with support services and ensure you have somewhere safe to get the support you need.***

Many Emergency Departments have Aboriginal Liaison Officers who are there to support Frist Nations patients. If you want to get in touch with the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, you can ask the admin staff or triage nurse.

Many Emergency Departments also have a Patient Experience Officer – They will usually be in medical scrubs or uniform in the waiting areas.

You can ask the Patient Experience Officer any questions you may have about the emergency department, like if you are worried about why you are waiting, if you need support, or if you need food or to charge your phone.

Your healthcare rights at the hospital as a young person

You have the right to:

- **ACCESS** – Healthcare services and treatments that meet your needs.
- **SAFETY** – Receive safe and high-quality health care that meets national standards. Be cared for in an environment that makes you feel safe.
- **RESPECT** – Be treated as an individual, and with dignity and respect. Have your culture, identity, beliefs, and choices recognised and respected.
- **PARTNERSHIP** – Ask questions and be involved in open and honest communication. Make decisions with your healthcare provider. Include the

people that you want in planning and decision-making.

- **INFORMATION** – Clear information about your condition, the possible benefits and risks of different tests and treatments, so you can give your informed consent. Receive information about services, waiting times and costs. Get assistance, when needed, to help understand and use health information. Access your health information. Be told if something went wrong during your health care, how it happened, how it may affect you and what is being done to make your care safe.

- **PRIVACY** – Have your personal privacy respected. Have information about you and your health kept secure and confidential (when age appropriate).

- **GIVE FEEDBACK** – Provide feedback or make a complaint without it affecting the way that you are treated. Have your concerns addressed in a transparent and timely way.

You are covered by the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights to feel safe and respected when receiving care from health professionals.

Doctors and nurses are there to help and support you and they are bound by the **Charter of Healthcare Rights**.

What happens after seeing the triage nurse/why am I still waiting?

Nurses will give you pain relief and order any initial x-rays or blood tests that can speed up your assessment.

You will usually be asked to wait in the main waiting room or other area inside the ED until you are seen by your main treating ED clinician; this may be a doctor, nurse practitioner or physiotherapist.

Sometimes there is a long wait in the ED and people who arrive after you get treated or taken inside before you. This is because their condition is deemed more

serious and the doctors and nurses need to see the sickest patients first.

When you are seen, the ED clinician may ask you some of the same questions as the triage nurse. This might feel like a repetition, but it helps staff get a clear picture of what is wrong and decide on the best plan for your care. They will explain what they want to do and why.

If you do not understand what they are saying, you can ask them to explain it in a simpler way. You can always ask the nurses questions later if you think of anything.

If you feel uncomfortable with any staff member or feel you are getting worse you can ask to speak with the senior staff member on duty. You should always feel safe, respected, and cared for while you are in the Emergency Department.

Your care is the top priority of all the staff, and they will treat you as soon as they can. You can always ask the nurse or administration staff for an update on when you might be treated if you have been waiting a long time.

What happens if I feel better, or I want to leave the ED?

Sometimes the pain relief and medicine given after triage will make you feel better and you feel ok to go home or make an appointment with your GP.

Or you may need to be somewhere else and cannot waiting any longer despite still feeling sick.

If you choose to leave the ED before being seen -tell the triage nurse or staff at the administration desk, so that they can provide advice, make sure you are safe and give you options for getting help.

The staff will also update their records to show that you have left ED.

If you need advice or are unsure about care options, you can call HealthDirect on **1800 022 222** and to talk to a nurse about your health condition. They may suggest going to your GP, an urgent care clinic or to the Emergency Department.

Who can come to the hospital with me?

You can bring a friend or family member or an adult that you trust with you to the Emergency Department.

> ***If you have anyone waiting with you, you can ask for them to leave while you speak with the doctor if you prefer to have the conversation privately.***

What might happen in hospital?

While you're at the hospital you might:

- Be treated by the nurse, doctor, Nurse Practitioner or physiotherapist.
- The health staff working with you may order blood tests, x-rays or ultrasounds to better understand your injury or illness.
- Be observed and treated but remain in the emergency department waiting room
- Be treated with stitches, dressings, a plaster cast, or taken into surgery
- Be prescribed medicine like pain killers or antibiotics
- Be discharged for follow-up with a General Practitioner (GP) – this means you would be given advice and told you need to go to your local doctor within the next few days
- Be admitted to hospital – this means you will need to stay at the hospital until you get better. How long you need to stay depends on how quickly you recover and if you need any additional tests or treatment.

- Be referred to an outpatient clinic
- Be transferred to another hospital for treatment.

What do I need when I am discharged from ED (told you can go home)

When you are discharged (this is when you are told you can go home) you will need:

- To know how you will get home. If transport is a problem, let the doctor or nurse know.
- The details of your health condition.
- Information about any treatment given, whether it should continue once you leave and for how long.
- A letter for your doctor (**general practitioner, or GP**).
- A letter for Work Cover or a medical certificate if you need it.