

Emergency Department



Introduction

The Emergency Department is a crucial part of a healthcare facility, providing immediate care to those with serious or life-threatening conditions. This topic guides you through what to expect when visiting an Emergency Department, the procedures followed, and how to prepare for such situations. Being informed can help reduce anxiety and ensure that you or your loved ones receive timely and appropriate help during emergencies.

Hospitals in Australia have emergency departments where you go when you are seriously unwell or injured. Emergency departments are open 24 hours and patients do not need to have appointments.

What happens when you arrive at an emergency department?

When you arrive at the emergency department, someone will ask you why you are there, so they can determine how quickly you need support and the order of the

next steps.

The next steps will include providing information about your name, address, and your Medicare number and talking to a triage nurse about why you have presented to the emergency department.

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. Admin staff also can't give you medical advice, the emergency doctor and triage nurse will help you with treatment and medical advice when you see them. You may speak to more than one person during this time as the Emergency Department can be busy.

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 provide professional nursing assessments of someone's injury and/or illness and prioritise treatment according to the urgency of need. Sometimes in larger hospitals there may be a number of nurses or staff who speak with you to support you.

The triage nurse will confirm your name and date of birth, they may also ask if you have any allergies, ask if you have been to hospital before and, ask if you take any medicine regularly. Do your best to answer their questions as they are asking to get a better understanding of how best to help you or the person you are helping.

Depending on what has brought you to hospital, the triage nurse might have to ask

tricky/ embarrassing questions when they talk to you, like “When did you go to the toilet last?” “Are you having sex?” “When was your last period?” or “have you taken any drugs or alcohol?”.

The triage nurse is a safe person to talk to and nothing embarrasses them. They need to ask these questions, so they have the right information to decide what you need and how to treat your illness. (Check about legality in this context – drug use, etc)

The triage nurse will try to make you feel comfortable and safe when asking questions and you will not get in trouble for any of your answers.

The nurse will keep your information safe, and your answers will only be shared with the doctor – if you are over the age of 14, information won’t be shared with your parents or anyone else unless you say it’s okay to do that. However, if they feel that you are at risk of harm, or of harming yourself or others, they may have to share your information with the Department of Community and Justice or the Police.

If you are there with your parent, and you would prefer to talk to the nurse without your parent present you can ask to be seen privately. You can ask for your information not to be shared with your parents or guardian and to remain private.

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

Tell the triage nurse if you start to feel worse. This will help the nurse re-prioritise care for you and other patients that are waiting.

If you decide to leave the hospital, tell the triage nurse or the administration desk. This will help the nurse re-prioritise care for other patients, so there is less confusion and less waiting time.

If you are worried about your safety at home, or if there is a person or place that is making you feel unsafe or scared, you can tell the healthcare staff or triage nurse that you feel this way and they can help you to get support and a safe place to stay.

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 recover and get the support you need.

Many Emergency Departments have Aboriginal Liaison Officers who are there to support First 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.

What are my rights as a young person at the hospital?

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](#).

Waiting to see the Doctor

You will most likely be waiting inside the emergency department treatment area until you see a doctor or Nurse Practitioner.

The doctor/Nurse Practitioner will ask you similar questions to the triage nurse. This might be uncomfortable, but the doctor is a safe and professional person who will keep your information private.

The doctor will then make a plan to help treat you and together with the nurses they will start your treatment.

The doctor should tell you what they think is the best treatment and any alternative options you have. If you don't understand what the doctor is saying you can ask them to explain it in a simpler way. You can also ask the nurses questions if you think of them later.

All the staff in the Emergency Department are there to help, and they are trained to support you and keep all your information safe.

If you are feeling uncomfortable with a staff member you can ask to see the head of staff on duty to talk to them about how you are feeling and why. You should never feel unsafe or uncared for in the Emergency Department.

I feel sick!! So why do some people get seen quicker? Why am I waiting?

Depending on how busy it is there can sometimes be a long wait in the Emergency Department.

This is why we encourage people to see a General Practitioner or local health service if it is not an Emergency.

Some people might come in after you have arrived but be treated before you. This is because the nurses and doctors need to see the sickest patients first.

There are some emergencies we can't see on a body, perhaps it's how you feel or what home is like. These types of emergencies can be just as important as a tummy pain and fever.

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.

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
- Need some tests, like blood tests, x-rays, scans or ultrasounds
- Be treated with stitches, dressings, a plaster cast, or taken into surgery
- Be prescribed medicine
- Be discharged for follow-up with a General Practitioner – 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.
- When you leave the emergency department Think about how you will get home. If transport is a problem, let the doctor or nurse know. When you are discharged (this is when you are told you can go home) you should ask for:
 - 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.

If you are unsure, you can call Health Direct on [1800 022 222](#) first to talk to a nurse about your health condition and find out if you need to go to the Emergency Department.