

# EMERGENCY AND AFTER-HOURS CARE

Because of the ever-increasing cost of healthcare, many insurance carriers are becoming more restrictive about the use of emergency rooms as an alternative to an office visit. You will notice this in the form of higher co-pays and/or deductibles for emergency room visits. We would like to outline for you some reasonable guidelines for care for your child when our office is closed.

First, remember that Emergency Rooms (including after-hours and urgent care facilities) are supposed to be used for true **EMERGENCIES**. An emergency is an event or illness that poses an immediate threat to life or limb. Examples of true emergencies include: SEVERE breathing difficulty from an asthma attack, croup, or an inhaled object, unconsciousness or "altered mental status" from any cause, uncontrollable bleeding from a wound, a prolonged seizure that has not stopped, an obviously broken bone, ingestion of a poison, suspected internal injuries or head injury from a motor vehicle or bicycle accident or fall, gunshot or stabbing wound, severe dehydration, illness with a fever in an infant less than two months of age.

This is certainly not an all-inclusive list, but you can judge from this list that an **EMERGENCY** should be an emergency. "Convenient" location or hours of an Emergency Room or After Hours Clinic should not be reasons to seek care there for a non-emergent problem. Insurance companies may be unwilling to pay for an ER visit for a non-emergent problem and you could end up responsible personally for hundreds or thousands of dollars in non-covered charges.

Urgent problems are those, which should be seen within 16 hours or so. Problems which fall under this category include mild or moderate wheezing or persistent coughing, suspected ear infections, persistent vomiting or diarrhea without dehydration, persistent abdominal pain, persistent fever, persistent

sore throat or suspected strep throat, urinary problems, constipation, rashes and suspected sinus infections. Again, this is not an all-inclusive list, but you should have a feel for problems that need to be seen soon, but not necessarily in the middle of the night at an expensive emergency facility. We can see most of these visits in our office within a day.

Problems that can be scheduled in our office at the convenience of both of our schedules include chronic headaches, chronic abdominal pain, school problems, ear rechecks, "fatigue", any problem that has been "going on" for some time, but really needs to be evaluated because it is not improving.

In short, After Hours/Emergency facilities should be used only for urgent or emergent problems that cannot wait until the office is open because waiting might be dangerous. They should not be used during the hours the office is open except in life-threatening situations. Remember, when you go to an emergency room for a mild or moderate illness, you will wait longer because the more severely ill or injured patients will receive care first, and the cost will be more. Emergency facilities should not be used because of problems of work schedule conflict, daycare problems, or transportation issues. As we all know, parenthood is not always convenient!

We recommend using a pediatric facility whenever possible if an emergency visit is necessary. The Children's Hospital has several After Hours Care clinics around the metro area. The closest one to our office is in Wheat Ridge, right next door! It opens at 5 pm on weekdays, and 8 am on weekends, and is open until midnight. You can also call our regular phone number after-hours to speak with a pediatric nurse from Children's Hospital for advice. Just call our regular number: 303-996-6005, or in Grand County call 726-1135, and you will be put in touch with an advice nurse from Children's Hospital.