

Why is it important to call your family doctor first when you have a medical need?

If you are having chest pain or another very serious symptom of an emergency, **it's important to go to the emergency room right away**. But if you have a medical need which can be dealt with outside of the emergency room, **it is better to call your family doctor than visit the ER or a walk-in clinic**.



Why call your family doctor first?

- **We know you.** Because we know our patients well and are familiar with their past and family medical histories, we often have much more insight into the likely causes of a symptom than a physician who meets you for the first time.
- **We are often able to see you quickly if you have an urgent need.** Even if your own family doctor is not able to see you right away, one of our colleagues often can – with the benefit of access to your health record.
- **Your health information is stored and available for you and your family doctor in the future.** Family doctors have the central role in ensuring that information from any of your interactions with the health care system is communicated to you and to other doctors who need to know.
- **We organise preventative care.** When we see you for something, we often talk about other things too. This includes keeping track of all the recommended preventive health screening, immunisations, and cholesterol and diabetes testing.

What happens when you visit a walk-in clinic?

Walk-in clinics have a role in the health system but they are not a substitute for your family doctor.

- **You may get unnecessary duplicate tests and treatments, or have your medication adjusted.** The doctor at the walk-in clinic is well-trained and doing their best, but has no access to your full health record. They may have to repeat blood tests or other investigations, which is not helpful. They may also adjust your medication, which can have unintended consequences.
- **Usually, your family doctor does not know what has occurred.** In most cases, there is no system of informing family doctors about what has happened at the walk-in clinic in a timely manner. Some walk-in clinics do not communicate useful information about your care at all.
- **Many people who visit a walk-in clinic end up visiting their family doctor for the same problem anyway.** This happens either because their issue did not resolve, or because they are checking to see if the walk-in clinic doctor advised them well. This is expensive and unnecessary.

Sometimes you may feel that a walk-in clinic is more convenient for you. We would politely request that you call our office anyway, or call Telecare to help you determine if your medical need could wait until our office re-opens.