



## WHY ARE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS OVERCROWDED?

**H**ospital emergency departments are the only place in the health care system where people can go for medical help any time of the day or night. No one can be turned away; it's the law.

Over the past decade, more and more people are coming to emergency departments. A large number of people who need emergency care are the elderly who often have complex illnesses, as well as people who are uninsured. People without health insurance often wait until they become very sick before turning to emergency departments for care.

Very sick patients often need to be admitted to the hospital, but if no

beds are available, they have to wait in the emergency department until one opens up. This practice is known as "boarding." It can back up the emergency department and cause other patients to wait even longer for care. Boarding also may cause the hospital to divert ambulances to less crowded emergency departments. Unfortunately, hospitals today are facing financial difficulties, which means they may not be able to afford additional staff or beds to resolve the boarding problem.

Even though emergency departments are not designed to provide comfort to patients who must stay overnight or even for a couple days, the emergency staff will do everything possible to make your stay comfortable.



## WHY DO SOME EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS TAKE SO LONG?

You may be in the emergency department for many hours, especially if you or a loved one have a complicated health problem. Finding out what is making you sick may require many tests. The emergency physician may also need to talk with another specialist about your health problem to find out how to help you feel better.

It also may take several hours for the emergency department staff to stabilize you so that your health problem is no longer life-threatening.

If you have a serious illness or injury, such as a heart attack or stroke, you may need to be admitted to the hospital for ongoing care. Because of a lack of bed capacity, you may have to wait in the emergency department until a bed becomes available in the hospital. This may take hours and sometimes even a few days.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

America's hospitals and emergency departments need YOUR support so we can continue to meet your medical needs and serve the best interests of the community. Help solve the overcrowding crisis by contacting your U.S. Representative and U.S. Senators and urging them to get involved and help hospitals solve this problem.

**TO CONTACT YOUR U.S. REPRESENTATIVE OR U.S. SENATORS, CALL THE U.S. CAPITOL SWITCHBOARD AT (202) 224-3121.**

**TO WRITE TO YOUR U.S. REPRESENTATIVE LOOK FOR HIS OR HER ADDRESS IN THE FRONT OF YOUR LOCAL TELEPHONE BOOK OR BY VISITING:  
[HTTP://WWW.HOUSE.GOV/WRITEREP/](http://www.house.gov/writerrep/).**

**TO WRITE TO YOUR TWO U.S. SENATORS LOOK FOR THEIR ADDRESSES IN THE FRONT OF YOUR LOCAL TELEPHONE BOOK OR BY VISITING:  
[WWW.SENATE.GOV/GENERAL/CONTACT\\_INFORMATION/SENATORS\\_CFM.CFM](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)**

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE ISSUES, VISIT THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS' WEB SITE AT [WWW.ACEP.ORG](http://www.acep.org).**

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