

## "When Should I Go to the Emergency Department?"

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Having difficulty breathing? Sudden pain? Sudden changes in vision? Get to the emergency department, advises the American College of Emergency Physicians.

In their recent statement, "When Should I Go to the Emergency Department?" the physicians' group details the symptoms that constitute a medical emergency.

"If you or a loved one think you need emergency care, come to the emergency department and have a doctor examine you," Dr. Frederick Blum, ACEP president, said in the ACEP statement.

"If you think the medical condition is life-threatening or the person's condition will worsen on the way to the hospital, then you need to call 911 and have your local emergency medical services provider come to you," he added.

Each day, over 300,000 individuals receive treatment in emergency departments throughout the country. Some people may be unsure of when to go to the emergency room, however, or may wonder if their symptom requires emergency care.

According to the college, the symptoms that necessitate an emergency department visit include the following:

- \* If you are experiencing difficulty breathing and/or shortness of breath
  - \* If you have chest or upper abdominal pain, or feel pressure in the chest area
  - \* If you have fainting spells or experience sudden dizziness or weakness
  - \* If you experience vision changes
  - \* If you are confused or otherwise experience any mental status changes
  - \* If you have uncontrolled bleeding
  - \* If you have severe or persistent vomiting or diarrhea
  - \* If you are coughing or vomiting blood
  - \* If you have any suicidal or homicidal feelings
- Bottom line? "If you think you have an emergency or if you think the problem may be something serious, don't wait," Dr. Mary Pat McKay, of George Washington University Hospital, in Washington, DC told Reuters Health. "Go and get it checked out," she said.

Yet, the signs indicative of a medical emergency may vary according to the age of the individual, experts say.

"The significance of symptoms does change with a person's age and their ability to communicate their symptoms," according to McKay, director of the hospital's injury center.

For example, a 2- or 3-month-old infant with a fever should be taken to the emergency department, whereas a 6- or 7-year-old child, or an adult, may not need such emergency treatment, she explained.

To get the best care while in the emergency department, ACEP advises that patients know their immunization status and bring along a list of the medications they are taking and any allergies they have.

Too often, many emergency department visitors do not know what medications they are taking or why they are taking them. In her practice, McKay has encountered many individuals who refer to their medications by color, rather than name, as in "I take the pink pill," or "I take a little white pill," she said.

For more information about emergency department care, or to view the warning signs of a medical emergency online, visit the American College of Emergency Physicians at

<http://www.acep.org/webportal/PatientsConsumers>  
<<http://www.acep.org/webportal/PatientsConsumers>> .