

# Understanding wait times



[www.ahs.ca/emergencywaittimes](http://www.ahs.ca/emergencywaittimes)

When you're not feeling well, waiting to be seen in an emergency department can be stressful and confusing.

Alberta Health Services is working hard to improve emergency wait times while ensuring you get the care you need when you need it.

These frequently asked questions will help you understand the demand on emergency departments and how this demand is managed.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why are other people being seen before me?

In emergency, the sickest patients will always be seen first. All Canadian facilities use the same standard tool to determine the seriousness of the each patient's illness and care for them accordingly.

### Why are wait times always changing?

Emergency demand can change quickly and dramatically. An incident such as a serious trauma can unexpectedly and significantly impact wait time.

### What if my condition isn't an emergency and I don't know where else to go?

Never leave the emergency department without first consulting with staff about the safety and appropriateness of other treatment options. If your condition is not an immediate emergency you may have other options for care.

- » Call Health Link at 811 for advice on symptoms and care options, toll-free, 24 hours per day/7 days per week.
- » After hours clinics are available at some physician offices. Call Health Link at 811 for more information.
- » Walk-in clinics can provide care for less urgent concerns if you don't have a family doctor, or can't get in to see your doctor soon enough.

## **The online wait time said two hours and I've now been waiting three hours, why?**

Many factors can affect the pressures in emergency departments and those demands can change quickly and significantly. Online wait times are calculated through a computer system that takes information from within the emergency departments and uses it to estimate the wait time.

## **What does the online wait time represent?**

The online wait time reflects an estimate of how long it will take from the time you are assessed by a nurse in the emergency department until you are seen by a physician.

## **How are wait times determined?**

Wait time is determined by comparing the number of people in the emergency department, with how many doctors are available to treat those patients.

This calculation does not take into account the most serious cases who will be seen immediately, and the less serious ones who may wait longer to be seen. Instead, the wait times focus on the typical wait time for the majority of emergency department visits.

## **How often are the online wait times updated?**

Online wait times are refreshed every two minutes.

## **Should I use the online wait times to determine where I should go?**

***In the case of a serious emergency always call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.*** The online wait time tool is meant to give the public general information about emergency wait times.

## **Should I leave the emergency to go somewhere else?**

For health and safety reasons, you should **NOT** leave without consulting with the emergency department staff.