



We recognize that a visit to an Emergency Department can be stressful for you and your family, especially during medical emergencies.

Our healthcare team will serve you as quickly as we can, and we will make every effort to make your visit a positive experience.

Are you in the right place?

- Understanding your medical options will help you get the right care as quickly as possible.
- Emergency Departments treat the sickest patients first. Patients with life- or limb-threatening injuries or illnesses are treated first, followed by those with less urgent illnesses or medical conditions.



Did you know ... our Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centres are open 24/7? They had more than 190,000 visits over the past year. That's an average of 520 per day.

Other medical options

If your medical problem isn't urgent, you may want to consider alternatives other than the Emergency Department.

Minor illnesses and injuries can often be treated more quickly through:

- Urgent Care Centres at our sites in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and St. Catharines (single entry point links the ED and UC services in St. Catharines)
- The walk-in clinic at our Niagara-on-the-Lake Site
- Your family doctor
- Community walk-in clinics
- Family Health Teams





Using any of these options for minor medical issues helps alleviate pressure on Emergency Departments and reduces wait times for everyone.

Not sure where to go?

For advice on the right place to receive the care you need, you can get help through these sources:

- Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000
- Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care lists Physicians, Emergency Departments, Urgent Care Centres and Walk-in Clinics in your area www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions or call **1-866-330-6206**

Did you know ... almost half of the patients at our EDs and UCCs are between the ages of 18 and 54, and almost one quarter are aged 65 and older.

When to go to an Emergency Department

Our specialized ED teams treat patients who come in following a 9-1-1 call and arrive by ambulance.

They also treat walk-in patients for emergencies including:

- Broken bones
- Dizziness
- Serious illness
- Serious injury
- Mental health issues



Did you know ... the top three reasons people visited our Emergency Departments over the past year were for abdominal and pelvic pain, throat and chest pains, and acute upper respiratory infections.



When to go to an Urgent Care Centre

Urgent care is medical attention and treatment for people experiencing less serious illnesses and injuries.

Experienced Emergency Department doctors and nurses provide urgent care. They have access to services such as X-ray, lab tests and pharmacy.

No appointments are necessary.



Did you know ... wait times are typically shorter in our Urgent Care Centres than in our Emergency Departments.

Urgent Care services include

- Minor abdominal pain (nausea, vomiting, flu)
- Coughs, colds, fever
- Ear, nose, throat and eye problems
- Minor mental health issues
- Cuts that may need stitches
- Sprains, strains, sports injuries
- Minor asthma attacks or allergic reactions



Did you know ... not all ER visits are actually emergencies. Almost 21,000 visits last year were for minor conditions and concerns that could have been treated more quickly by a family doctor, at a walk-in clinic or elsewhere in the community.



Calling 9-1-1

In all medical emergencies, call 9-1-1. When in doubt, call 9-1-1.

Niagara Emergency Medical Services (EMS) has the right system in place to ensure patients are safely cared for when they need emergency medical help.

Paramedics provide emergency pre-hospital medical care to stabilize a patient's condition at the scene and during transport to hospital.



How long does a visit to the Emergency Department take?

It is difficult to estimate how long your wait will be. Wait times can vary, and change quickly, due to a number of factors, including:

- The severity of each patient's condition or illness
- The number of other patients seeking medical attention
- Whether you require diagnostic or lab tests, such as a CT scan or blood work
- Traffic accidents with numerous casualties or patients arriving with life- or limb-threatening conditions who need immediate medical attention
- The time of day; mornings tend to be less busy than evenings. Weekends also tend to be busier when family doctors are not on duty.



It may appear quiet in the waiting room, but it may be very busy in the area where patients are being treated.

We are doing our best to care for you as quickly as possible. Your co-operation helps us provide more timely care. Please be respectful of our staff and other patients and visitors.

Did you know ... almost 30,000 patients arrived at our EDs last year by ambulance.

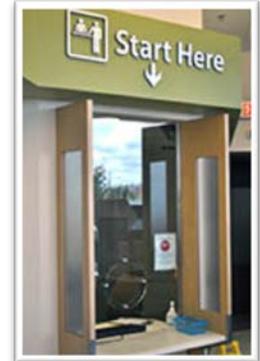


When you arrive

The first step for all patients arriving at an Emergency Department/Urgent Care is to be assessed by a Triage Nurse.

The Triage Nurse will evaluate your condition and prioritize your medical need.

Patients are seen on a priority basis, not on a first-come first-served basis. This ensures the sickest patients get the care they need first — even though they may arrive at the ED after other patients.



Assessing your condition

To evaluate your medical needs, the Triage Nurse will ask you for details about:

- the circumstances that brought you to hospital
- your history of illness or injury
- whether you have allergies
- which medications you take



The nurse will also check your temperature, pulse or blood pressure during the triage process.

Did you know ... The word 'triage' comes from the French word 'trier' and means to separate, sift or select.

Determining medical priority

Triage nurses across Canada use the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) to evaluate medical urgency. There are five triage levels, No. 1 being the most critical and No. 5 being non-urgent.

Level 1

Critical — obviously life threatening

Conditions requiring resuscitation, including cardiac arrest, shock and major trauma





Level 2

Emergent — potential threat to life or limb

Examples include asthma, altered mental state, chest pain suggestive of heart problems

Level 3

Urgent — a condition or serious problem requiring emergency intervention

Examples include abdominal pain, mild dehydration, kidney stone or shortness of breath

Level 4

Less Urgent — conditions which because of distress or potential for complications would benefit from intervention

Examples include vomiting and diarrhea with no dehydration, bladder infections, lacerations and earaches

Level 5

Non Urgent — conditions which are non-urgent and/or which might be part of a chronic problem

Examples include sore throat and insect bites

Did you know ... The majority of our ED and Urgent Care patients last year (89,772) were Triage'd as Level 3.

While you wait

- Tell the Triage Nurse immediately if your condition changes or you begin to feel worse.
- Don't leave the ED without telling the Triage Nurse and having your condition re-evaluated.
- Don't eat or drink anything without speaking to the Triage Nurse first — some tests cannot be performed if you have consumed food or beverages.
- Wash your hands frequently with a cleansing solution provided in the waiting area and throughout the ED. Handwashing is key to prevent and control the spread of infection.
- Have only one friend or family member wait with you, if possible. This will help reduce your own level of stress and prevent overcrowding.
- If possible, leave young children at home in the care of an appropriate person.
- Please be respectful and courteous to other patients and hospital staff.





The stages of your stay

Most people arriving at an Emergency Department will follow these steps:

- Arrival in Emergency Department
- Triage
- Registration
- Consultation with our healthcare team
- Diagnostic, lab tests as required
- Diagnosis
- Treatment begins
- Discharge or admission



You may be requested to wait between some of these stages.

If you have respiratory symptoms, you may be asked to wear a mask. This is for the safety of others in the waiting room.

Did you know ... Approximately one if every 10 patients who come to our EDs are admitted directly to the hospital.

What we're doing to make your experience better

Providing a quality patient experience is a top priority for our Emergency Department physicians, staff and volunteers.

Here are some of the things we've done to reduce wait times and improve your hospital experience:

- Added more coverage by nurse practitioners, who can treat patients with less urgent conditions
- Improved collaboration with Niagara Emergency Medical Services to provide rapid attention to patients arriving by ambulance.
- Added additional volunteers to support our patients and families, including providing warm blankets, answering questions, helping with communication, and giving directions. Our volunteers wear red vests. Feel free to stop them when you see them.





Did you know ... We are focusing on improving the patient experience, from the ED to discharge, and implementing creative solutions to ensure patients have safe and prompt attention to their healthcare needs.

What to bring when you come to the Emergency Department

- Ontario Health Card
- Medical insurance information if you live outside Ontario
- List of current medications
- Any records you have regarding your health
- Private health insurance cards
- Personal Health Information Card

NHS Personal Emergency Information Card

The Niagara Health System has created a Personal Emergency Information Card to help prepare you for a health emergency. Copies of the card are available in the ED and can also be downloaded and printed [here](#). You are encouraged to keep it up to date and carry it in your wallet.

Filling out a Personal Emergency Information Card will help emergency responders and hospital personnel ensure your treatment is appropriate and respects your wishes.

Fill out the form below, cut along the dotted line, fold it and

PERSONAL EMERGENCY INFORMATION CARD

Niagara Health System

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Health Card #: _____

You may receive a bill for some hospital services

A valid Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card covers most hospital services, but there are a few things that are not covered:

- Ambulance charge of \$45 (OHIP covers the remainder of the cost)
- Medical equipment such as crutches, casts, knee immobilizers
- Charges for a semi-private or private room if requested by the patient
- Transportation home from the hospital

If you are not covered by OHIP or your OHIP card has expired, you will be charged for your hospital visit as well as a physician fee.

If you receive any of these services, please see the cashier to make payment before you leave the hospital.



Women, Babies and Children

If you are pregnant

If your labour pains start, you have any bleeding, you think your water may have broken or you are concerned about your pregnancy in any way, please go directly to the Women's and Babies' Unit at our St. Catharines Site.

Always call 9-1-1, if you are worried that you cannot get to the hospital on your own and you will be taken to the St. Catharines Site ED.



Call 9-1-1 or go directly to the new St. Catharines Site ED for all other emergency women's health (gynecological) issues.

Children to age 18

Always call 9-1-1 or, if safe to do so, take your child to the nearest Emergency Department in an emergency.

The ED physician will care for your child and consult with the On-Call Pediatrician, if appropriate.

If your child requires more comprehensive assessment or hospitalization, he/she will be referred to our family-centred Children's Unit the St. Catharines Site or other appropriate healthcare facility.

When to call 9-1-1 if pregnant

Pregnant women should call 9-1-1 and be taken directly by ambulance to the St. Catharines Site for any of the following conditions:

- When your labour pains are five minutes apart and you have no other way to reach the hospital within 30 minutes
- You suddenly start bleeding heavily
- It feels as if your baby is going to come out
- You suddenly develop abdominal pain that does not go away
- You suddenly get a headache that is different or worse than anything you have had before



For all women

Go to the St. Catharines Site ED if you are experiencing:

- Heavy vaginal bleeding
- Any other gynecological emergency issue

Mental Health and Addictions

Mental Health Care

If you or a loved one is experiencing any of the following mental health and addiction emergencies, you should go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 9-1-1 if you are unable to get to the hospital safely (for example if you have taken an overdose).



- Thinking about ending your life or have attempted to end your life
- Thinking about hurting others or have hurt someone
- Experiencing voices commanding you to hurt yourself or others
- Making choices that put you in serious danger
- Not being able to care for yourself, which puts you at risk
- Experiencing serious medication side effects such as swollen tongue, difficulty swallowing, unusual eye movements, severe muscle rigidity, etc.
- Thinking about or have taken a drug overdose
- Consuming excessive quantities of alcohol and combining this with prescription or other medications.

If you call 9-1-1, you will be taken to the St. Catharines Site Emergency Department except when medical issues require immediate care at the hospital nearest to your residence.

Services available in the community

If you or a loved one is experiencing a mental health or addictions crisis, there are a number of services available to assist you in the Niagara region. Examples of crisis situations include:

- Relationship/family issues
- Housing problems
- Occupational issues
- Financial issues
- Bereavement and grief reactions
- Substance and alcohol use



Adult Mental Health Services

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Safe Bed Program

The Safe Bed Program provides 24/7 short-term residential crisis support for individuals age 16 or older who are experiencing a mental health crisis.

The Program offers crisis counseling and a safe therapeutic environment for men and women to stay for a short term as an alternative to hospitalization.

Program staff work with individuals to resolve their crises and link them with available supports in the community.

Referrals can be made by therapists, counselors, physicians, psychiatrists, crisis workers, advocates, or any other professionals with a working knowledge of the individual's current situation and relevant history. In some cases where enough information is already known, a self-referral may be considered.

Location: 15 Wellington Street, St Catharines, ON, L2R 5P7
Call 905-641-5254 for more information or to make a referral.

COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Team) Niagara

- Provides 24/7 crisis line services.
- Mental health professionals work as a team in partnership with police officers who are specially trained to work with individuals with mental health and addictions issues who are in crisis.
- Information is collected over the phone by a qualified health professional and if needed, an outreach mobile team will assess the person experiencing the mental health crisis in their community.
- Ongoing telephone support and/or referral to appropriate follow-up services may be recommended.
- COAST services are available for individuals with mental health, substance use and social issues such as homelessness.
- COAST has a Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) team that assists older adults with cognitive impairments due to mental health problems, addictions, dementia or other neurological conditions who are in crisis.
- Call toll free: 1-800-263-4944



When to go to an Community Addiction Services of Niagara (CASN)

- Walk-in services are available Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.
- Services are designed to help individuals and their relatives/significant others with alcohol, drug and gambling problems to obtain effective treatment.
- Services include assessment, individualized treatment planning, referrals to appropriate resources and counseling.
- Location: 60 James Street, Suite 401, St. Catharines, ON, L2R 7E7
- Telephone: 905-685-5425

Distress Centre Niagara (CASN)

- Provides 24/7 free, confidential telephone crisis support and intervention for anyone in the Niagara region.
- St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Area: 905-688-3711
- Port Colborne, Wainfleet and Area: 905-734-1212
- Fort Erie and Area: 905-382-0689
- Grimsby, West Lincoln: 905-563-6674

Niagara Health System IMPACT (Integrated Mobile Program for Acute Community Treatment)

- Provides regional mobile services including assessment and treatment for individuals within their home or preferred location.
- Services are available for individuals age 16 years and older with acute mental health and addictions issues.
- Individuals may be referred by mental health and addictions partners within the community.
- Referrals are accepted Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- An initial telephone contact occurs within three days of referral.
- Telephone: 905-378-4647, ext. 46400



Niagara Health System Withdrawal Management Services (WMS)

- WMS supports men and women (within separate care environments) while intoxicated, in withdrawal, or in crisis as a result of alcohol and/or drug use.
- The free, confidential service is provided within a supportive, comfortable environment which is open 24/7.
- Services include crisis intervention, withdrawal management, assessments, supportive counseling, self-help groups, consultation, treatment referrals and discharge planning.
- No referral is required.
- Men's Program Location: 10 Adams Street, St Catharines, ON, L2R 2V8. Telephone, 905-682-7211.
- Women's Program Location: 6 Adams Street, St Catharines, ON, L2R 2V8. Telephone, 905-687-9721.

Oak Centre

- Oak Centre is a psychosocial rehabilitation program following the clubhouse approach for people with serious and ongoing mental health issues.
- Services are available for individuals 16 years of age and older.
- Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Wednesday 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- 3rd Saturday of the month 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Location: 24 Dorothy St., Welland, ON L3B 3V7. Telephone, 905-788-3010.



Children’s Mental Health Services

Kids’ Help Phone

- Kids Help Phone is a free, anonymous and confidential 24/7 phone and on-line professional counseling service for youth.
- Call toll free: 1-800-668-6868

Pathstone Mental Health Crisis Services

- A mobile crisis intervention service providing immediate telephone counseling and, if necessary, on-site crisis intervention in the home, school, hospital, or other community location.
- Services are available 24/7 for children and youth up to the age of 18 and their families.
- Counselors have access to psychiatric and psychologist consultation.
- Information will initially be collected over the phone and an on-site intervention will be organized if assessed as appropriate.
- Call toll free 1-800-263-4944

Compliments or concerns?

Your feedback is vital to help us make your experience the best it can possibly be. Have a question or concern with care at the NHS? Please contact Patient Relations by email at patientrelations@niagarahealth.on.ca or call 905.378.4647 ext. 44423.

Our Locations

Our Emergency Departments (Open 24/7)	Our Urgent Care Services (Open 24/7)	Our Walk-in Clinic
<p>St. Catharines Site 1200 Fourth Avenue St. Catharines</p> <p>Greater Niagara General Site 5546 Portage Road Niagara Falls</p> <p>Welland Site 65 Third Street Welland</p>	<p>St. Catharines Site 1200 Fourth Avenue St. Catharines</p> <p>Douglas Memorial Site 230 Bertie Street Fort Erie</p> <p>Port Colborne Site 260 Sugarloaf Street Port Colborne</p>	<p>Niagara-on-the-Lake Site 176 Wellington Street Niagara-on-the-Lake (Hours: Monday to Friday 9:30 a.m. to Noon and 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.)</p> <p>Main NHS Switchboard 905.378.4647</p>