

GETTING HEALTHCARE WHEN YOU ARE SICK

Different countries have different systems for people to access healthcare services. In some countries, you can phone and ask a doctor to treat you at your home for any illness or you go to a hospital to see a doctor. It is different here in Alberta. When you are sick or injured, you should seek treatment as soon as possible. In terms of the order of urgency, here are your choices:

1. Call Health Link Alberta
2. Visit your Family Doctor or go to a Walk-In clinic
3. Go to an Urgent Care Centre
4. If you think it is life-threatening or could be life-threatening, go to an Emergency Department in a hospital

What is Health Link Alberta and how do I use this service?

When you are sick or injured, you can call Health Link Alberta. Health Link Alberta is a 24-hour nurse advice and health information telephone service. You can call Health Link Alberta to get information about health concerns that you have. It is operated by nurses and information specialists. You can press 1 on your phone to speak to an information specialist to find the health services within your area or press 2 to speak to a nurse for any health advice. It is a free service available 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Health Link Alberta is available to the whole province of Alberta.

How do I communicate on the phone if I don't speak English very well?

Health Link Alberta and phone interpreters break through communication barriers to help people get the information they need. When you phone Health Link Alberta you will first hear a recorded message in English explaining the service. Do not hang up the phone, instead, press 2 on your phone to speak to a nurse. After you press 2, do not hang up the phone – wait on the line and someone will speak to you soon. When a nurse comes on the line, all you need to do is to state the name of the language you speak, in English – for example, “I speak Cantonese”. Do not hang up the phone as a phone interpreter will then be arranged for you so you can ask questions in your own language. The interpreter will help the nurse understand your situation and they will then interpret advice from the nurse about what you should do – including things that can be done safely at home & whether you need to be seen by a doctor. Those who do not have a family doctor and do not have a life threatening medical concern, but need attention within 24 hours can be referred, by Health Link Alberta, to a doctor who will see them the next morning.

What is the phone number for Health Link Alberta?

You can call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465), in Edmonton at 780-408-LINK (5465) or in Calgary 403-943-LINK (5465) to speak to a Health Link Alberta nurse through a phone interpreter.

What does a family doctor do here in Alberta and how do I find one?

When you are sick or injured, you can also visit your family doctor. In Canada, it is important for you and your family to find a family doctor. A family doctor offers services such as annual check-ups, monitoring of the growth and development of your children, giving prescriptions, and ordering tests such as mammograms, Pap tests, bone density tests, X-ray, blood tests etc. Depending on your health conditions, your family doctor might give you a referral to a specialist. After your visit to a specialist it is important to be followed up by your family doctor so that your medical history will be kept in one place. Often specialists or hospital doctors will need to consult with your family doctor. Therefore, it is a good idea to have a family doctor for yourself and your family. If you are looking for a family doctor who is accepting new patients, or if you want to see a family doctor after office hours, you can call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465), in Edmonton at 780-408-LINK (5465) or in Calgary at 403-943-LINK (5465) or visit www.albertahealthservices.ca to find one.

What is a Walk-In Clinic and how do I find one close to my home?

If you do not have family doctor or your family doctor is not available, you can go to a Walk-In Clinic. Walk-In means you do not need to make an appointment. When you arrive, show your Alberta Health Care Card.

If this is the first time to visit the Walk-In Clinic, you will be asked to fill out a medical history form. You then wait to be seen by a healthcare provider. The doctor will see you on a first come, first serve basis. Walk-In clinics are not meant to replace your family doctor. It is important for you to be followed-up by your family doctor after your visit to the Walk-In clinic. To find a Walk-In clinic, look up “clinics” in the *Yellow Pages* telephone directory.

What is an Urgent Care Centre and how do I find one close to my home?

When you are sick or injured, you can also go to an Urgent Care Centre. An Urgent Care Centre is a medical centre for people who have unexpected but not life-threatening health concerns that need to be treated on the same day they came. These include broken bones, muscle sprains, asthma, pain and infections. Both adults and children can be treated at any Urgent Care Centre. You do not need an appointment. Most Urgent Care Centres are open 7 days a week. For example, in Calgary, the Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre is open 24 hours a day. For a list of Urgent Care Centres and locations, you can call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465), in Edmonton at 780-408-LINK (5465) or in Calgary at 403-943-LINK (5465) or visit www.albertahealthservices.ca to find one.

What is the role of the Emergency Department?

People with life-threatening or possible life-threatening conditions should NOT go to an Urgent Care Centre. They should go to the Emergency Department at a hospital right away or call 911 for ambulance services. Emergency Departments offer 24 hour medical care for everyone. They also treat life-threatening health problems. The Alberta Children’s Hospital in Calgary cares just for children from birth to age 18. For a list of Emergency Departments and locations in Alberta, you can call Health Link Alberta. Not all rural areas have emergency departments. Even if they do, not all rural emergency departments are open 24 hours a day. It is a good idea to find out where the nearest emergency departments are located. Most of the care given in the hospital is covered by Alberta Health Care Insurance.

What is the process of being seen in an Emergency Department?

It is important for you and your family to carry the Alberta Health Care Card to receive healthcare services. People who come to Emergency Departments will be assessed by a triage nurse to determine their medical urgency. Sickest patients are seen first. Patients who are less sick will be asked to wait in the waiting area. Once you are in the treatment area, a nurse will ask you questions about your health condition. Some tests might be done. When the doctor comes to see you, you will be asked similar questions. The doctor asks these questions just to make sure you will be given proper diagnosis and treatment. Depending on your medical condition, sometimes a specialist might join to treat you. If you are very sick, you might be asked to stay in hospital for more treatment.

How do I communicate in the Emergency Department if I do not speak English very well?

If you have trouble speaking or understanding English, tell a staff member what language you speak, and if the service exists in your area, an interpreter will then be arranged for you in person or over the phone. By using a trained interpreter, you can avoid misunderstanding. As well, your privacy is very important. Interpreters will keep all information confidential just like any healthcare professional.

Remember: When you are sick or injured, you should seek treatment as soon as possible.

In terms of the order of urgency, here are your choices:

1. Call Health Link Alberta
2. Visit your Family Doctor or go to a Walk-In clinic
3. Go to an Urgent Care Centre
4. If you think it is life-threatening or could be life-threatening, go to an Emergency Department in a hospital

Source: “Getting Healthcare when you are sick” DVD, Alberta Health Services

If you want to read any of the previous ‘Road To Healthy Living’ series articles, please go to http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm and get health information in your own language