

Health Care in Ontario: Getting Medical Care

In many cases, people who look for medical care do not have an emergency. They may simply be sick or injured and need help.

There are many ways to get non-emergency medical care in Ontario. There are trained medical staff who can answer your questions by phone. There are family doctors, nurses and other health care providers. In most cases, they are the first to check out and treat your medical problems. This fact sheet will help you understand your choices.

You can find this fact sheet online in more languages at www.ontario.ca/healthcarebasics. Click on the "Information in Other Languages" button. The online version will also give you links to learn more about getting medical care in Ontario.

Understanding your health care choices

1. Is there someone I can call to get medical advice?

Yes. Call [Telehealth Ontario](http://www.ontario.ca/telehealth) at 1-866-797-0000. This is a free, confidential phone service that you can call any time, night or day. You can get health advice or general health information from a nurse. The nurse will help you decide if you should:

- take care of yourself at home
- make an appointment with your doctor
- go to a clinic
- go to a hospital emergency room.

2. Who can help me with a non-emergency problem?

You will most likely see:

- A family doctor: A family doctor is also called a general practitioner (GP) or medical doctor (MD). He or she can help diagnose and treat more complicated health problems or refer you to see a specialist if you need further help.
- A nurse practitioner (NP): An NP is like an advanced nurse. He or she can assess and treat basic illnesses and injuries, and order lab tests, X-rays and other diagnostic tests.

Looking for a doctor or nurse practitioner? Sign up for **Health Care Connect**. You can [register for this free service online](#) or call 1-800-445-1822. Make sure you have a valid card for the **Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)**. You can [learn more about OHIP](#) online.

3. When I need to get medical care, where do I go?

It depends on the kind of help you need. [This chart sums up your main choices.](#)

Health care option	What it is...	When you may need it...
Telehealth (1-866-797-0000)	This is a free, confidential phone service. You can call to get health advice or general health information from a Registered Nurse.	When you need help any time of day or night to decide what to do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ care for yourself ▪ make an appointment with your doctor ▪ go to a clinic ▪ contact a community service ▪ go to a hospital emergency room.
Doctors and other family health care providers	This includes your family doctor and nurses. They focus on family medicine, diagnose and treat diseases, physical disorders and injuries of patients of all ages.	When you need care for non-emergency situations.
Family Health Teams	A Family Health Team brings together different health care providers to deliver the highest possible quality of care for enrolled patients. Teams include nurses and other professionals who work together to provide you with a range of health care options.	When you need care for non-emergency situations.
Nurse Practitioner Clinics	At these clinics, you can get basic health care and learn about staying healthy and preventing disease. The clinics will also help you find other services and community-based programs you may need.	If you do not have a family doctor and need basic health care.
Community Health Centres	Centres provide health and health promotion programs for individuals, families and communities.	When you have trouble getting health care due to barriers such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ language ▪ culture ▪ physical disabilities ▪ homelessness ▪ poverty ▪ remote locations.

Health care option	What it is...	When you may need it...
Walk-in or after-hours clinic	This is a non-hospital based clinic where you can get care for simple, non-emergency needs. Clinic hours often extend into the evenings and weekends. You can often 'walk in' without an appointment.	When you need care for non-emergency situations.
Urgent Care Centre	Urgent Care Centres provide help for non-life threatening conditions during the day, in the evening and on weekends. These Centres can provide all types of services except surgery.	When you need immediate care for minor or uncomplicated conditions in less urgent situations. Examples: eye injuries, wounds, broken limbs, X-rays and laboratory tests.

4. Where can I get help if my health problems make it hard to live at home?

Contact your local [Community Care Access Centre](#). They help people live in their own homes longer or move to a long-term care home. There are 42 centres across the province.

5. I have questions about using the health care system in Ontario. Who can I call?

Contact ServiceOntario, INFOLine between 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. Staff will be able to help you in English, French and 20 other languages. Call:

- 1-866-532-3161
- TTY 1-800-387-5559
- In Toronto, TTY 416-327-4282