
Accessing Care and Understanding ER Wait Times

Summer has finally arrived and you may find that you or a family member needs medical care. What should you do? The staff and physicians at Huron Health System—Alexandra Marine & General Hospital (HHS-AMGH) in Goderich are here to help with these important tips!

First, it is important to seek out the right level of care. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, then CALL 911 and EMS (Emergency Medical Services) will begin providing care as soon as they arrive and transport you to the closest open emergency department. If you are not experiencing a medical emergency, but feel that your symptoms are urgent then consider these options:

1. Call your family physician or nurse practitioner's office and request an appointment
2. Contact Health Connect Ontario at <https://healthconnectontario.health.gov.on.ca/static/guest/home> or by calling 811 or 1-866-797-0007 and speak to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
3. Visit <https://www.urgentcareontario.ca> to access urgent care without leaving home
4. Visit a local walk in clinic
 - Grand Bend Area Community Health Centre at 69 Main Street East in Grand Bend, ON (Phone 519-238-2362) on Saturdays from 9am to 11:30am
 - South Huron Medical Centre at 23 Huron Street West in Exeter, ON (Phone 519-235-3343) on weekends and holidays from 11am to 2pm
5. Visit your closest open emergency department. Follow the social media pages of your local emergency department to stay up to date on information regarding service reductions/closures.

Once you decide to visit your closest emergency room (ER), you may encounter increased wait times. Why are you waiting? Well, there are a number of reasons:

1. Higher than normal number of patients visiting the ER due to increased tourists/seasonal residents, service reductions/closures of other local ERs, local respiratory illness outbreak (i.e. flu or COVID)
2. Medical doctor (MD)/Nurse Practitioner (NP) are attending to a more urgent patient (i.e. heart attack or stroke patient seen before someone with sore ears)
3. Lab or diagnostic tests have been ordered and need to be completed and resulted
4. MD has been called to another area of the hospital to attend to a critically ill patient, provide anesthesia or deliver a baby
5. MD/nursing has left the hospital to accompany an unstable patient to another facility
6. MD/NP is speaking to a specialist or family member
7. Ongoing human health resource shortages of staff and physicians in all departments
8. Lack of current physical space to see patients (due to higher number of inpatients being held in the ER and improvements being made to certain spaces)

Did you know that HHS-AMGH emergency department had 15,675 patient visits in 2022-2023. What can you do to help? Come to the ER only if you are experiencing a medical emergency or if your symptoms are urgent and you cannot access care elsewhere. If you come to the ER, bring some reading material and your patience! We are happy to continue to provide our community with exceptional and compassionate care! Stay healthy and safe!