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Urgent Care Centers

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An urgent care center is a walk-in clinic focused on the delivery of medical care for minor illnesses and injuries in an ambulatory medical facility outside of a traditional hospital-based or freestanding emergency department (ED). Other names for similar types of facilities include but are not limited to after hours walk-in clinics, minute clinics, quick care clinics, minor emergency centers, and minor care clinics. In some instances, facilities have used the term “emergency” in their name or advertisements, for example, “Minor Emergency Clinic” or “We Treat Emergencies.”

Although the Urgent Care Association of America and the American Academy of Urgent Care Medicine have criteria for urgent care clinics, there are limited regulations or state licensing requirements.

The services provided at urgent care clinics across the country offer a wide range of care. Unlike EDs associated with a hospital, urgent care facilities do not have state or federal mandates to see, treat, or stabilize patients without regard for the patient’s ability to pay.

The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) believes that any facility that does not meet the definition of an ED or freestanding ED as defined by ACEP and that advertises itself as providing unscheduled care should:

- Not use the word “emergency” or “ER” in its name in any way.
- Not use the word “emergency” or “ER” in any advertisements, claims of service, or to describe the type or level of care provided or as an alternative to an ED. Doing so may be considered a deceptive trade practice, as defined by federal or applicable state law.
- Be required to comply with appropriate state or federal licensing requirements that specify staffing and equipment criteria to provide clear information to patients accessing medical care.

ACEP believes that urgent care centers do play a role in the provision of unscheduled care, but the lack of regulation has caused confusion for patients and puts patients at risk if they present to an urgent care center with a truly emergency medical condition that requires ED care. Therefore, ACEP

encourages all states to have regulations regarding urgent care centers and the use of the word “emergency” consistent with this policy and with input from ACEP chapters in the state.