

# WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

## Talking Points

### **Violence against emergency physicians, nurses, and staff is more common than many people think.**

- **91%** of emergency physicians said that they, or a colleague, were a victim of violence in the past year. ([ACEP poll, 2024](#))
- **Nearly half (48%)** of emergency physicians said that legislation to strengthen workforce protections would make them feel safer on the job. ([ACEP poll, 2024](#))

### **The rate of violence against healthcare workers is higher than many other occupations.**

- Workers in the healthcare sector are four times more likely to experience serious workplace violence than those in private industry, on average. (“Workplace Violence in Healthcare: Understanding the Challenge, Occupational Safety and Health Administration,” 2015)
- **85%** of emergency physicians said they believe the rate of violence experienced in emergency departments has increased over the past five years. ([ACEP survey, 2022](#))
- Assaults causing injuries increased from a quarter to a third of assaults in the past several years. ([ACEP survey, 2022](#))
- The rate of injuries from workplace violence against healthcare professionals has grown by more than **60%** since 2011. ([Boyle, 2022](#)).

### **Assaults against healthcare workers create lasting injuries.**

- Injuries have caused nearly twice as many missed shifts in the last few years. ([ACEP poll, 2022](#))
- Although healthcare workers are just 10 percent of the national workforce, they account for 48 percent of missed workdays due to assault. ([Emergency Nurses Association \(ENA\), May 2025](#))

### **Assaults are typically committed by patients and patients’ family members.**

- **31%** of assaults were committed by family members or friends. ([2022 ACEP survey](#))

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## Hospitals and physician employers can do more to respond to violent incidents.

- **68%** of emergency physicians believe the hospital response was inappropriate, with half saying nothing was done. ([ACEP poll](#), 2024)
- Tracking emergency department violence is challenging because many healthcare workers do not report incidents, whether out of fear of retaliation against them, or because they repeatedly see that reporting rarely leads to meaningful action.

## The most common forms of assault are verbal threats of violence, hitting, spitting, punching, kicking, scratching, and biting. [2022 ACEP survey](#)

### Emergency physicians have submitted [countless stories of their assaults](#). Some painful highlights:

- “I’ll meet you in the parking lot and kill you”
- “They ran out of the ED, throwing urine on everyone”
- “They kicked a nurse and put another patient’s mother in a choke hold”
- “Police felt they were too violent for jail and did not arrest them.”
- “Our employer did nothing.”

## Violence in the ED is unacceptable. Physicians and care teams deserve a support system that helps prevent these incidents and protects them when they occur.

### ACEP is leading a comprehensive, multi-year campaign to strengthen protections for healthcare workers.

- Gathering hundreds of [stories](#) directly from the people on the frontlines.
- Calling for federal guidance on ED signage —a practical, immediate step to help.
- ACEP led a coalition of healthcare groups [urging CMS to issue clear guidance](#) that enables EDs to post signage discouraging violence against healthcare workers.
- Developing legislation that would make assaulting a healthcare worker a federal crime, such as the bipartisan Save Healthcare Workers Act.
- Raising the bar for emergency departments through ACEP’s Emergency Department Accreditation Program [criteria](#) requiring hospitals to address ED violence.
- Partnering with the Emergency Nurses Association on the No Silence on ED Violence [campaign](#).
- Pursuing solutions that work in the communities where emergency physicians live and work, led by ACEP chapters.