

This document explains what the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can do for you if you ever need emergency care. When it is not possible for you to go to a VA Medical Center (VAMC), you should go to the nearest hospital that has an emergency room (ER). If you are in an ambulance, the paramedics will usually take you to the closest emergency room.

What is an emergency?

A medical emergency is an injury or illness so severe that without immediate treatment, it threatens your life or health. Your situation is an emergency if you believe your life or health is in danger. If you believe your life or health is in danger, call 911 or go to the nearest ER right away. You *do not* need to call the VA before calling for an ambulance or going to an emergency room.

When should I contact the VA regarding an ER visit?

You, your family, friends or hospital staff should contact the nearest VAMC as soon as possible, preferably within 72 hours of your emergency, so you are better aware of what services VA may or may not cover. Provide VA with information about your emergency and what services are being provided to you. Ask VA for guidance on what emergency charges are covered, so you can plan accordingly.

If the doctor then wants to admit me to the hospital, must I obtain advance approval from the VA?

If the admission is an emergency, advance approval is not required although prompt notification to the VA is necessary (within 72 hours). If the admission is *not* an emergency, then you must obtain advance approval from the VA.

Will I have to pay for transportation to a VA facility?

VA will assist with transportation arrangements and may be able to pay for such expenses. Contact the nearest VA Medical Center for guidelines.

If a VA bed is available and I can be safely transferred, do I have to move to the VA hospital?

Yes, if you want VA to continue to pay for your care. If you refuse to be transferred, VA will not pay for any further care.

If I am admitted to the hospital as a result of an emergency, how much will VA pay?

Depending on your VA eligibility, VA may pay all, some or none of the charges. Some highlights are listed in the next column, and you may ask your local VA Medical Center's VA Community Care Office for further eligibility guidance.

For service-connected conditions, some of the criteria that must be met are:

- Care or services were provided in a medical emergency, *AND*
- VA or another federal facility were not feasibly available, *AND*
- VA was notified within 72 hours of the admission.

For nonservice-connected conditions, some of the criteria that must be met are:

- Veteran is enrolled in the VA health care system, *AND*
- Veteran has received health care services from VA within the previous 24 months, *AND*
- Veteran has no other health insurance coverage.

How do I know if I have a service-connected condition?

A service-connected condition refers to an illness or injury that was incurred during or aggravated by military service, and has a rating assigned by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

How long do I have to file a claim for reimbursement for emergency medical care?

File your claim with the nearest VAMC quickly because time limits usually apply. For nonservice-connected care, the time limit is 90 days. Again, consult your local VA Medical Center for more information.

Will VA pay for emergency care received outside the United States?

VA will only pay for emergency care outside the U.S. if your emergency is related to a service-connected condition. For more information about care provided outside the U.S., contact the Foreign Medical Program at 1-877-345-8179, or visit the website at <http://www.va.gov/purchasedcare/>

How do I get more information?

Visit the VHA Office of Community Care website at <http://www.va.gov/purchasedcare/> for more information on emergency care for Veterans.