After Hours Medical Advice

Presented by the Boulder Valley Care Network

Did you know that you could call your physician’s office to speak with a doctor after hours about your urgent medical concerns? This service, offered by all physician practices and clinics in the Boulder region provides you with peace of mind, knowing you can access a physician by phone when your primary care physician's office or your clinic is closed for the evening or weekend.

Read further or watch a video conversation with Fabio Pivetta, DO, of Milestone Family Medicine, a family health service of Longmont United Hospital, about After Hours Medical Concerns at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYZO0LVFM0g (Copy and paste this link into your browser if the link does not work. The video may take a minute to upload depending on the speed of your Internet access.)

How can I access a physician after hours?
When you call your physician’s office after hours, you will be connected to either the on-duty physician or a trained operator who will reach the on-duty physician on your behalf and have them return your call as soon as possible. The physician will discuss your symptoms with you and advise you as to next steps. These may include:

- Advising you that it’s ok to wait to schedule an appointment during regular office hours if your symptoms do not get worse,
- Requesting that you meet them at the office for an after-hours appointment,
- Directing you to an urgent care center, or
- Directing you to call 911 or to go to the nearest emergency room.

Again, if you are wondering if you or a family member may need urgent medical attention after hours, but do not believe your condition is an immediate emergency, call your physician’s office to talk to a doctor on duty.

- If you have a primary care physician, we recommend that you keep your physician’s name, address and phone numbers with you and/or save this information into your phone, so you can easily call in case such urgent medical concerns arise.

If you do not already have a primary care physician, it is important that you find a physician in your network. If you need recommendation for a primary care physician in the area who is taking new patients, feel free to call Karen Haimes, RN, Boulder Valley Care Network Care Coordinator at 303.530.3405, ext. 8, or e-mail: khaimes@bvipa.com. She can provide you a listing of several practices and physicians in the area who are part of the CIGNA PPO network.

When should I go to the emergency room or call 911?
If in your best judgment you or someone else has a limb or life-threatening emergency, immediately call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

What if I need a prescription refilled and my physician’s office is closed?
This should be a rare event. When you need a refill of your medication approved, you should make every attempt to request a refill from your pharmacist in advance and during normal business hours. However, in the event that you need an emergency refill for a prescription after hours that your doctor has said cannot be discontinued for any period of time (one example is Coumadin), call either your pharmacy, if it is open, or your physician’s office. You should try to have your prescription number if you call the pharmacist. Your pharmacy will then contact your physician with your refill request. If you are due to see the doctor, the pharmacy may remind you of this need. If the pharmacy is closed, call the on-call number for your physician to speak to the on-call provider for help with emergency refills.

If you use mail-order pharmacy services and need a refill order, you should request a refill from your physician’s office during normal business hours.

**Proceed with courtesy and consideration when deciding to call the on-call doctor.** While the on duty physician is there to guide you through the best care options and decisions of urgency during “after hours”, call only if true uncertainty exists in how to proceed. Remember doctors may have other patients in need of emergency guidance and care.

**What are some examples of situations that may be life threatening and when one should call 911 immediately?**

- Chest pain that occurs with exertion, pain radiating to left arm or neck, associated with difficulty in breathing, nausea, and sweating
- Slurred speech, numbness, weakness, or visual changes
- Choking
- Loss of consciousness
- Not breathing or difficulty breathing
- Suspected poisoning or overdose
- Severe injuries, such as suspected broken bones, head injuries or heavy bleeding
- Suicide attempt
- Seizures or convulsions
- Numbness or paralysis of an arm, leg or one side of the body
- A sudden, severe headache, especially if there is neck pain or a change in consciousness at the same time
- Domestic violence or rape
- Coughing up blood
- Vomiting blood or something that looks like coffee grounds
- A change in mental ability, such as not knowing where you are or being unable to recognize familiar people
- Heavy vaginal bleeding
- Headache, stiff neck, and fever
- Severe visual changes

All these symptoms may be a sign of an emergency and you should call 911 or visit the emergency department as soon as possible. It is impossible to list all emergencies, so
often you will have to use your best judgment. Always follow your instincts on how you or a loved one is feeling and acting, when making your decision on where to seek care. Do not waste valuable time by calling the on-call doctor. Proceed quickly to the emergency department.