

# Access to Optimal Emergency Care for Children

Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine

Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of All Children

## ABSTRACT

Millions of pediatric patients require some level of emergency care annually, and significant barriers limit access to appropriate services for large numbers of children. The American Academy of Pediatrics has a strong commitment to identifying barriers to access to emergency care, working to surmount these obstacles, and encouraging, through education and system changes, improved levels of emergency care available to all children.

## INTRODUCTION

Millions of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults seek emergency care every year in the United States. Many individuals may not receive appropriate acute care in a timely fashion because of numerous obstacles. Emergency departments (EDs) are the nation's safety net. EDs provide comprehensive acute care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.<sup>1-3</sup> Factors that weaken this safety net disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Access to appropriate pediatric emergency medical care is important for children, because substantial morbidity may occur if care is delayed.

### Problems That Restrict Access to Care

- A. Lack of universal understanding and application of a definition of "emergency."
- B. Lack of reasonable access to alternative sources of health care so that the ED is left as the only place that will see everyone.
- C. ED crowding and diversion of emergency medical services (EMS).
- D. Lack of universal access to enhanced or basic 911 services and wireless 911 service for cellular phones, with reliance in some areas on local 10-digit emergency telephone numbers.
- E. The misconception that freestanding urgent care centers provide comprehensive emergency services and that all EDs are equally equipped to care for children.
- F. Variability in the availability of appropriate equipment, supplies, and medications in emergency departments for children of all ages.<sup>4</sup>
- G. Variability in pediatric training and experience among physicians and nurses staffing EDs.
- H. Lack of pediatric training and experience for prehospital EMS and interhospital transport personnel.

[www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2006-2900](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2006-2900)

doi:10.1542/peds.2006-2900

All policy statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics automatically expire 5 years after publication unless reaffirmed, revised, or retired at or before that time.

#### Key Words

access to care, emergency readiness, emergency medical services for children

#### Abbreviations

ED—emergency department  
EMS—emergency medical services  
AAP—American Academy of Pediatrics  
EMSC—Emergency Medical Services for Children

PEDIATRICS (ISSN Numbers: Print, 0031-4005; Online, 1098-4275). Copyright © 2007 by the American Academy of Pediatrics

- I. Lack of evidence-based guidelines for care efficacy and safety within all levels of emergency medical services for children.
- J. Lack of access to pediatric emergency medical care in many regions of the country.
- K. Lack of reliable access to pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and mental health professionals.
- L. Lack of, or failure to initially identify, the medical home, or failure to return the child to the medical home after ED discharge.
- M. Lack of or inadequate reimbursement for primary care for large numbers of children.
- N. Managed care protocols that bypass regional emergency services for children.
- O. Managed care protocols designed to reduce the use of emergency facilities without providing appropriate alternatives for care.
- P. Failure by payers to use the “prudent-layperson” standard for definition of emergency.
- Q. Retroactive denial of third-party payment when diagnostic signs and/or symptoms suggest an emergent condition but the final diagnosis (often established after evaluation and treatment) is “nonemergent.”
- R. Denial of payment for services to insured patients for any reason (eg, preexisting or chronic conditions).
- S. Increasing legislation and managed care initiatives related to emergency access for children that often require complex and time-consuming telephone calls and documentation.
- T. Fears borne by families of ill or injured children regarding immigration issues, social service agency intervention for child custody concerns, and other legal or financial concerns.
- U. Language and education barriers to understanding appropriate utilization of less emergent sources of care.

Since the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published the original policy statement on access to emergency care in 1992<sup>5</sup> and a revision in 2000,<sup>6</sup> several substantial advances have occurred.

#### **Advances That Promote Access to Emergency Care**

- Significant increases in the number of emergency medicine residents and residency programs that include specific training and experience in pediatric emergencies.
- Development of dual pediatrics-emergency medicine residency training programs.

- Significant increases in pediatric emergency medicine fellowship programs.
- Increased availability of physicians with specific training and certification in pediatric emergency care.
- A substantial and ongoing increase in the presence of board-certified emergency medicine physicians in EDs throughout the country.
- Increasing numbers of providers at all levels taking pediatric emergency courses such as Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS),<sup>7</sup> Advanced Pediatric Life Support (APLS),<sup>8</sup> the Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP),<sup>9</sup> and the Emergency Nursing Pediatric Course (ENPC).<sup>10</sup>
- Improvements in pediatric education for EMS providers and the Pediatric Education for Prehospital Professionals (PEPP) program.<sup>11</sup>
- Many available resources covering school and child care emergencies<sup>12,13</sup> (see additional publications at <http://bolivia.hrsa.gov/emsc> and [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) and courses at [www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org)).
- Publication of the Institute of Medicine 1993<sup>14</sup> and 2006<sup>3</sup> reports on pediatric emergency care.
- Development of models and educational materials on access to pediatric emergency medical care through the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program of the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Maternal and Child Health Bureau (see <http://bolivia.hrsa.gov/emsc>).<sup>15</sup>
- Publication of new manuals and texts that provide education and information about access to pediatric emergency care.<sup>16</sup>
- Publication of statements and guidelines for pediatric facility categorization, emergency centers, office preparedness, urgent care centers, and prehospital and interfacility transport<sup>17–20</sup> (including a policy statement currently in development from the AAP on preparation of the offices of pediatricians and pediatric primary care providers).
- Institutional adoption of pediatric facility standards, such as Emergency Departments Approved for Pediatrics [EDAP], through legislation or voluntary participation.<sup>21</sup>
- Development of model legislation for emergency care for children.
- Formation of the Pediatric Emergency Care Applied Research Network (PECARN) as a means to promote evidence-based approaches to care.<sup>21</sup>

Despite this progress in access to emergency care, more advances are needed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The AAP recommends that every child in need have access to quality pediatric emergency medical care. Efforts must be made at local, state, and federal levels to:

1. Improve prompt and appropriate access to pediatric emergency medical care for all children regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, immigration status, type of insurance, location, or health status.
2. Increase public, professional, and government awareness about the magnitude of the problem of access to pediatric emergency medical care for children.
3. Fund, support, and promote the further development and improvement of EMS for children at federal, state, and local levels.
4. Improve awareness, dissemination, and use of the large body of resources available through the Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau's EMSC program and provide ongoing funding support for future resource development, education, research, and outcomes evaluation by the EMSC program, as recommended in the 2006 Institute of Medicine report.<sup>3</sup>
5. Improve optimal emergency care for children throughout every aspect of the EMSC continuum, from injury prevention to tertiary-level pediatric emergency and critical care to rehabilitation, and ultimately coordinate emergency care through the medical home.
6. Promote the development of evidence-based guidelines and other strategies, such as medication dosing guidelines, to improve care consistency and quality and to reduce errors in the emergency care of children.
7. Fund, support, and further develop research efforts directed at all aspects of pediatric emergency care to provide the foundation for evidence-based standards for efficacious and safe patient care.
8. Encourage the implementation of enhanced (emergency-access) 911 systems and wireless 911 services for cellular phones.
9. Improve collaboration between schools, child care facilities, mental health professionals, medical homes, and local EMS to facilitate easy access into the EMS system.
10. Encourage collaborative efforts by emergency care physicians and primary care physicians to identify a medical home for every child. If a medical home is not identified, the ED should initiate the process of locating a medical home for follow-up and ongoing care after discharge.
11. Encourage the use of the emergency information form (EIF) published by the AAP and American College of Emergency Physicians (<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;104/4/e53>) for children with special health care needs.
12. Encourage all EDs to establish transfer agreements with facilities with higher levels of pediatric care to ensure timely access to pediatric emergency and subspecialty tertiary care for critically ill and injured children.
13. Encourage state and local EMS system and ED preparedness for pediatric emergencies and care of children in disasters.
14. Encourage the availability of existing pediatric medical subspecialists, pediatric surgical specialists, and mental health professionals who have special skills and expertise that are required for comprehensive and optimal care of critically ill and injured children.
15. For pediatric surgical specialists and pediatric medical subspecialists who are in short supply, encourage the expansion of training programs to ensure the future availability of these professionals necessary to provide specialized pediatric care.
16. Support and facilitate the practice of telemedicine to optimize the delivery of care for services that can be delivered via telemedicine.
17. Encourage managed care organizations to accept the prudent-layperson definition of an emergency and to provide reimbursement for services mandated by the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (42 USC §1395dd).
18. Payers should cover the expense of language-translation services required to provide emergency care.

The AAP membership and leadership, as advocates for children, can and should make a strong commitment to assist pediatricians and families in making decisions about seeking timely and appropriate emergency care.

### COMMITTEE ON PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY MEDICINE, 2005–2006

Steven E. Krug, MD, Chairperson

Thomas Bojko, MD, MS

Margaret A. Dolan, MD

Karen S. Frush, MD

Patricia J. O'Malley, MD

Robert E. Sapien, MD

Kathy N. Shaw, MD, MSCE

Joan Shook, MD, MBA

Paul E. Sirbaugh, DO

\*Loren G. Yamamoto, MD, MPH, MBA

### LIAISONS

Jane Ball, RN, DrPH

EMSC National Resource Center

Kathleen Brown, MD  
National Association of EMS Physicians  
Kim Bullock, MD  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
Dan Kavanaugh, MSW  
Maternal and Child Health Bureau  
Sharon E. Mace, MD  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
Susan Eads Role, JD, MSLS  
EMSC National Resource Center  
David W. Tuggle, MD  
American College of Surgeons  
Tina Turgel, BSN, RN-C  
Maternal and Child Health Bureau

#### STAFF

Susan Tellez

\*Lead author

#### REFERENCES

- Krug SE; American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. Overcrowding crisis in our nation's emergency departments: is our safety net unraveling? *Pediatrics*. 2004;114:878–888
- Richardson LD, Hwang U. Access to care: a review of the emergency medicine literature. *Acad Emerg Med*. 2001;8:1030–1036
- Institute of Medicine, Committee on the Future of Emergency Care in the United States Health System. *Emergency Care for Children: Growing Pains*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2006. Available at: [www.nap.edu/catalog/11655.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11655.html). Accessed November 14, 2006
- Middleton KR, Burt CW. Availability of pediatric services and equipment in emergency departments: United States, 2002–03. *Adv Data*. 2006;Feb 28(367):1–16
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. Access to emergency medical care. *Pediatrics*. 1992;90:648
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. Access to pediatric emergency medical care. *Pediatrics*. 2000;105:647–649
- Hazinski MF, Zaritsky AL, Nadkarni VM, Hickey RW, Schexnayder SM, Berg RA, eds. *PALS Provider Manual*. Dallas, TX: American Heart Association; 2002
- Gausche-Hill M, Fuchs S, Yamamoto L, eds. *APLS: The Pediatric Emergency Medicine Resource*. 4th ed. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2004
- Kattwinkel J, Niermeyer S, Denson SE, Zaichkin J, eds. *Textbook of Neonatal Resuscitation*. 4th ed. Dallas, TX: American Heart Association and Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2000
- Emergency Nurses Association. *Emergency Nursing Pediatric Course Provider Manual*. 3rd ed. Des Plaines, IL: Emergency Nurses Association; 2001
- Dieckman R, Brownstein D, Gausche-Hill M, eds. *Pediatric Education For Prehospital Professionals*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2000
- Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Emergency Medical Services for Children Program. *Emergency Guidelines for Schools: Guidelines for Helping an Ill or Injured Student When the School Nurse Is Not Available*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Public Safety; 2001. Available at: [http://ems.ohio.gov/EMSC%20web%20site\\_11\\_04/pdf\\_doc%20files/EMSCGuide.pdf](http://ems.ohio.gov/EMSC%20web%20site_11_04/pdf_doc%20files/EMSCGuide.pdf). Accessed October 4, 2005
- Mulligan-Smith D, Luten R, Camejo M, eds. *How to Prevent and Handle Childhood Emergencies: A Handbook for Parents and People Who Care for Children*. Washington, DC: Maternal and Child Health Bureau; 1997. Available at: [www.nedarc.org/nedarc/emscProducts/EP000576.pdf](http://www.nedarc.org/nedarc/emscProducts/EP000576.pdf). Accessed October 4, 2005
- Institute of Medicine, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medical Services. *Emergency Medical Services for Children*. Durch JS, Lohr KN, eds. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 1993
- Krug S, Kuppermann N. Twenty years of emergency medical services for children: a cause for celebration and a call for action. *Pediatrics*. 2005;115:1089–1091
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. *Childhood Emergencies in the Office, Hospital, and Community: Organizing Systems of Care*. Seidel JS, Knapp JF, eds. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2000
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine, and American College of Emergency Physicians, Pediatric Committee. Care of children in the emergency department: guidelines for preparedness [reaffirmed March 2004]. *Pediatrics*. 2001;107:777–781
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Task Force on Interhospital Transport. *Guidelines for Air and Ground Transport of Neonatal and Pediatric Patients*. 3rd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2006
- Shaw KN; American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. Pediatric care recommendations for freestanding urgent care facilities. *Pediatrics*. 2005;116:258–260
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine. Emergency preparedness for children with special health care needs. *Pediatrics*. 1999;104(4). Available at: [www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/104/4/e53](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/104/4/e53)
- Illinois Emergency Medical Services for Children. Facility Recognition. Available at: [www.luhs.org/depts/emsc/facility.htm](http://www.luhs.org/depts/emsc/facility.htm). Accessed November 14, 2006
- Dayan P, Chamberlain J, Dean M, et al. The pediatric emergency care applied network: progress and update. *Clin Pediatr Emerg Med*. 2006;7:128–135

**Access to Optimal Emergency Care for Children**  
Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine  
*Pediatrics* 2007;119;161  
DOI: 10.1542/peds.2006-2900

**Updated Information & Services**

including high resolution figures, can be found at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/161>

**References**

This article cites 9 articles, 6 of which you can access for free at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/161#BIBL>

**Subspecialty Collections**

This article, along with others on similar topics, appears in the following collection(s):

**Current Policy**

[http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/current\\_policy](http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/current_policy)

**Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine**

[http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/committee\\_on\\_pediatric\\_emergency\\_medicine](http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/committee_on_pediatric_emergency_medicine)

**Emergency Medicine**

[http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/emergency\\_medicine\\_sub](http://www.aappublications.org/cgi/collection/emergency_medicine_sub)

**Permissions & Licensing**

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:

<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/Permissions.xhtml>

**Reprints**

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:  
<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/reprints.xhtml>

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



# PEDIATRICS®

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

**Access to Optimal Emergency Care for Children**  
Committee on Pediatric Emergency Medicine  
*Pediatrics* 2007;119;161  
DOI: 10.1542/peds.2006-2900

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is  
located on the World Wide Web at:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/161>

Pediatrics is the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. A monthly publication, it has been published continuously since 1948. Pediatrics is owned, published, and trademarked by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Boulevard, Elk Grove Village, Illinois, 60007. Copyright © 2007 by the American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 1073-0397.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

