



American College of
Emergency Physicians®

ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

POLICY STATEMENT

Approved January 2021

Definition of Emergency Medicine

Revised January 2021,
June 2015, April 2008,
April 2001

Reaffirmed October 1998

Revised April 1994 with
current title

This statement replaces
“Definition of Emergency
Medicine and the Emergency
Physician” *Ann Emerg Med*
(Adopted March 1986;
15:1240-1241 October 1986)

Emergency medicine is the medical specialty dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of unforeseen illness or injury. It encompasses a unique body of knowledge as set forth in the “Model of the Clinical Practice of Emergency Medicine.” The practice of emergency medicine includes the initial evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, coordination of care among multiple clinicians or community resources, and disposition of any patient requiring expeditious medical, surgical, or psychiatric care.

Emergency medicine is not defined by location but may be practiced in a variety of settings including, but not limited to, hospital-based and freestanding emergency departments (EDs), urgent care clinics, observation medicine units, emergency medical response vehicles, at disaster sites, or via telehealth.

Emergency medicine encompasses planning, oversight, and medical direction for community emergency medical response, medical control, and disaster preparedness. Emergency medicine professionals provide valuable clinical, administrative, and leadership services to the emergency department and other sectors of the health care delivery system.

Emergency physicians are the foundation of the United States health care system's patient safety net. They possess a clear understanding of the various sectors of the health care delivery system and the needs of their patients. Emergency physicians are uniquely positioned to evaluate, plan, and implement community and regional public health initiatives.