

Unscheduled return visits within 72 hours in pediatric emergency care: clinical burden, risk indicators, and outcome trends

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Introduction: Unscheduled return visits (RVs) to Paediatric Emergency Departments within 72 hours of discharge are an important quality indicator in paediatric emergency care. Caregivers often return to the ED when symptoms persist or worsen, contributing to overcrowding and increased healthcare utilization. These patients may require higher acuity care, admission, or specialist evaluation due to concerns of disease progression or missed diagnoses.

Objective: To evaluate the clinical characteristics, revisit patterns, and outcomes of paediatric patients returning to the emergency department within 72 hours of discharge.

Methodology: A retrospective chart review was conducted across five emergency departments operated by the Child Life Foundation from December 1, 2024, to May 31, 2025. Data were extracted from the Electronic Medical Record system and included age, presenting complaints, triage category at revisit, and patient outcomes.

Results: During the study period, 134,000 patients were registered, with 87,000 discharged from the ED. A total of 2,901 patients returned within 72 hours, yielding a revisit rate of 3.3%. Children aged 1–5 years accounted for the largest group (1,235; 43%). Most revisits were triaged as Priority 2 (2,420; 83%). Gastrointestinal complaints were the leading cause of revisits (1,060; 37%), followed by respiratory illnesses (930; 32%), fever (532; 18%), and other complaints (379; 13%). Outcomes included discharge home (1,290; 45%), hospital admission (739; 26%), LAMA (475; 16%), referral (232; 8%), DOR (157; 5%), and death (8; 0.2%).

Conclusion: A considerable proportion of paediatric return visits may be preventable through improved discharge practices and caregiver education. The notable admission rate among revisiting patients highlights the need for standardized discharge protocols and enhanced follow-up strategies to improve patient outcomes and optimize emergency department resources.

Keywords: Emergency Department, pediatric revisits, unscheduled return.

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