

## Study: Millions of New Yorkers are overusing hospital emergency rooms



*Jennifer Lewke*

A new study shows millions of New Yorkers are overusing hospital emergency rooms and driving up everyone's insurance premiums.

Using data reported to the NYS Health Department, Excellus BlueCross Blue Shield estimates that out of the 6.4 million visits to hospital emergency rooms in New York State in 2013, two million of them were for preventable conditions that could and should have been treated by primary care physicians. In Monroe County alone, out of every 100 ER visits, 20-30 of them were not significant enough to warrant emergency services.

Not long ago, Bandar Madani of Henrietta had to rush his three-year old daughter Maria to the emergency room. He says, "It was very late at night and she had a really high fever, so we decided to bring her to the emergency room," he says. But when they got there, they had to wait for hours in an ER that was very crowded.

"Many of the visits are for sore throats, colds, sprains, sinus infections," says Dr. Jamie Kerr, the medical director at Excellus.

She says it costs insurance companies eight times more for a patient to be treated in an emergency room compared to a primary care office. Those costs eventually get passed along to all customers in the form of premium increases. "We're not telling you not to go to the ER but if you think it's not serious and if your physician is not available, there are options other than going to the ER," says Dr. Kerr.

"Whenever she gets sick, we call her doctor first and then we decide if her situation needs go to the urgent care," says Madani.

That's ultimately the best course of action but a lot of ER overuse comes from patients who simply don't have or can't find a primary care doctor. "We have areas of primary care shortages," Dr. Kerr says.

That's why New York State and the Federal Government have created incentive programs to encourage medical students to go into primary care. The hope is that by offering to pay their loans and giving bonuses to work in more rural areas, the shortage will shrink.

If you need help finding a primary care physician, contact the Medical Society in the county where you live:

**Medical Society of New York – [www.mssny.org](http://www.mssny.org)**

**Monroe County Medical Society – [www.mcms.org](http://www.mcms.org)**