

A GUIDE

CHOOSING THE

Right Hospital



If you or a loved one need to choose a hospital, it is important that you pick one that will give you the best possible care. But how do you decide what hospital is best for your needs? Fortunately, there is a tool to help you do this.

About Hospital Compare

Hospital Compare, at www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov, is a free and reliable website that includes hospitals across the entire country. It was developed by a group of national experts to help you find out the following:

- Which hospitals are best for treatment of a condition such as a heart attack, pneumonia, diabetes, or childhood asthma, as well as appropriate use of medical imaging such as MRIs and CT scans
- Which hospitals are best in preventing surgical complications and infections; and
- What patients say about their hospital experience.

Inside This Guide

This guide has examples and tips to help you get started with Hospital Compare.

- See examples of what Jim and Monique find using Hospital Compare.
- Use the steps on page 4 to get charts or tables like theirs.
- Get answers to common questions about Hospital Compare on pages 7 and 8.
- Check out other resources to help you make smarter health care decisions on page 9.

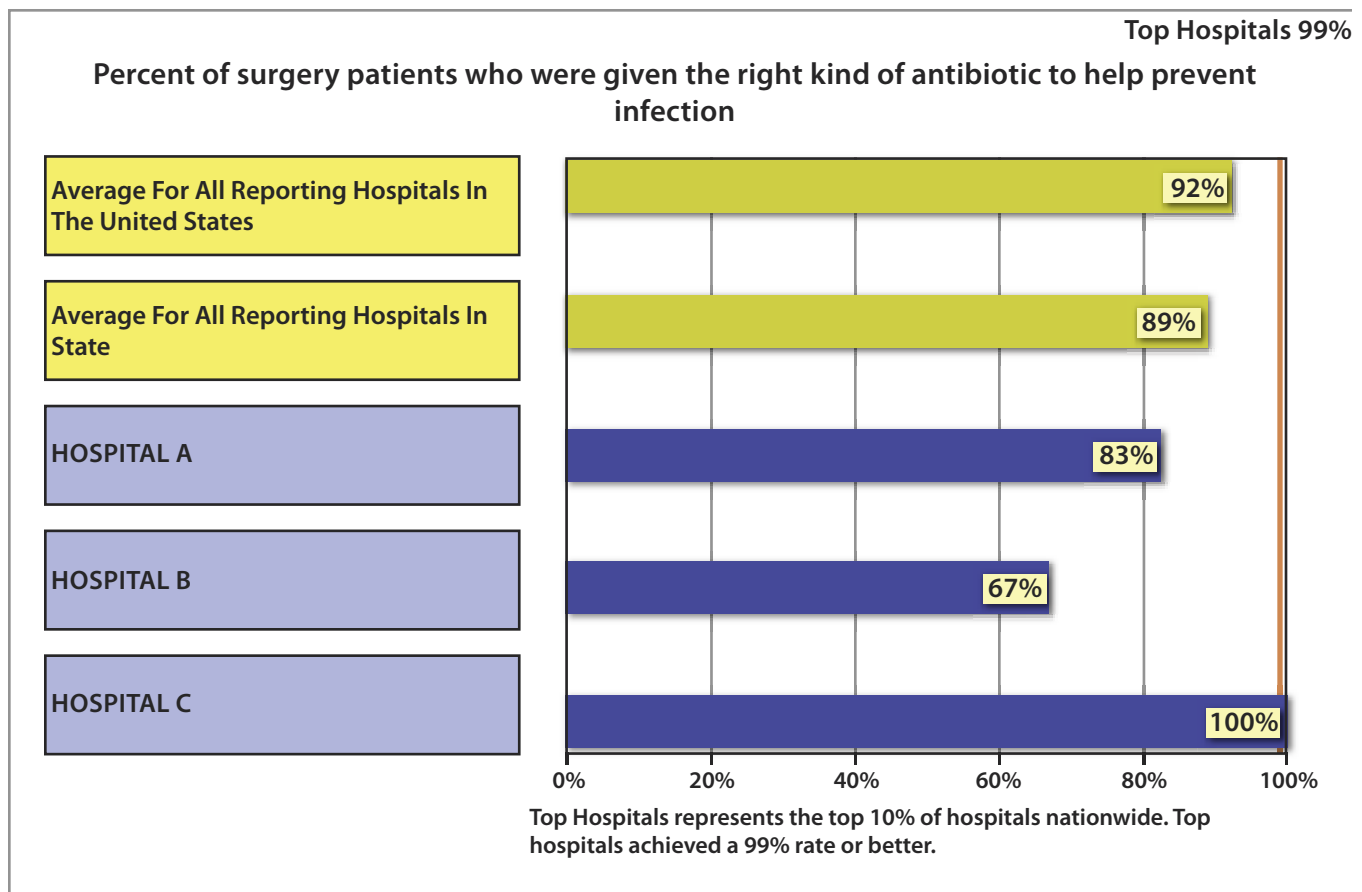
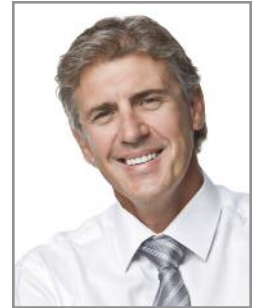
Take Action!

Remember, it is important to learn about your options and ask questions. As a patient, you should work with your doctor to take charge of your health.

Examples

Example: Jim

Jim needs surgery requiring him to stay overnight in the hospital. He wants to know which hospital in his area provides the safest surgical care. Jim uses the steps on page 4 of this guide to find this graph at Hospital Compare.



What Does This Graph Mean?

The graph reports one measure of surgical care—how often surgery patients receive the right kind of antibiotic to help prevent infection, a dangerous possible complication of surgery. The higher the score, the better. The best hospitals in the U.S. meet this treatment standard for 99% of patients. This is very good.

Among the three hospitals Jim picked that are in his insurance plan, Hospital C performs much better – 100%. The other two do not perform as well.

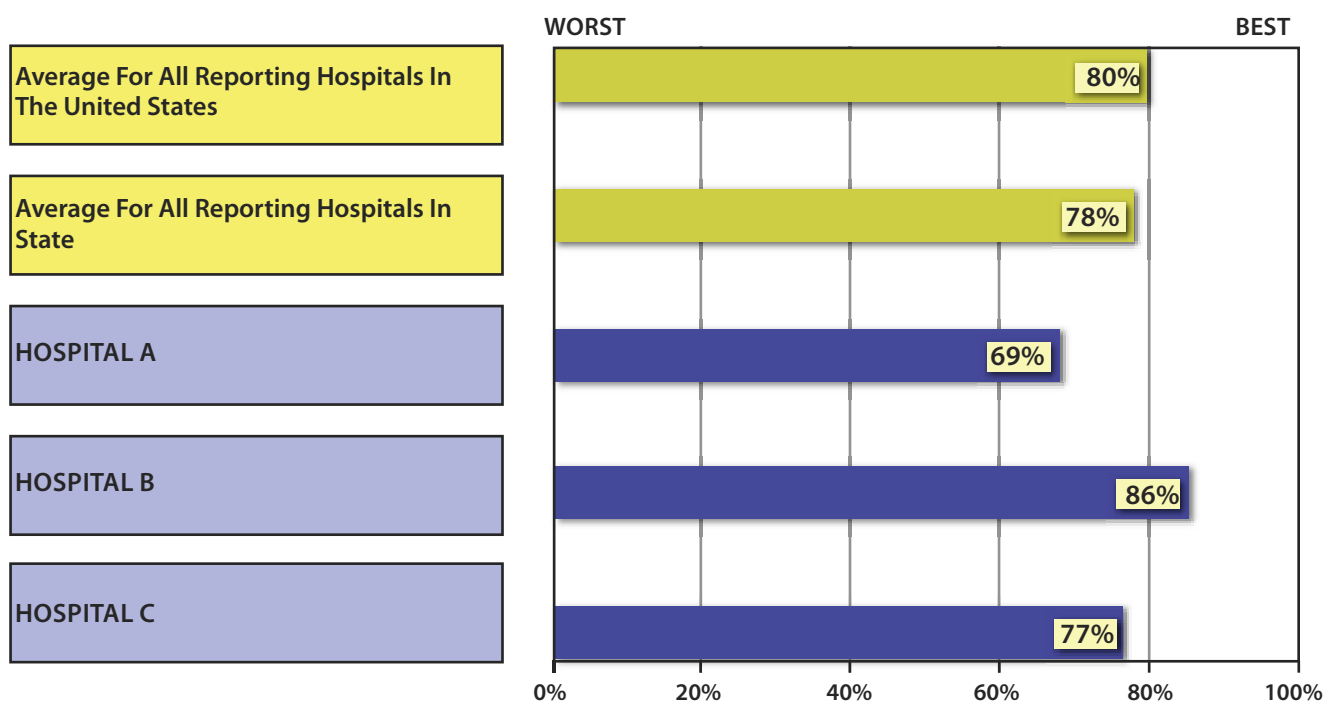
Looking at other graphs on other quality measures, Jim sees that some of the differences between the hospitals show up again and again. Jim asks his surgeon what hospital he recommends, and he recommends Hospital C.

Example: Monique

Monique’s father and mother live in another state. Her father has diabetes and is in and out of the hospital. Monique uses Hospital Compare to see what patients have said about their experience in a particular hospital, such as how well pain was managed and what to do when they go home from the hospital. Here is one example.



Were patients given information about what to do during their recovery at home?



What Does This Graph Mean?

The graph shows what patients said when asked if they had been given information about what to do when they go home. They answered “yes” or “no.” Nationally, 80% of all patients who responded to the survey said “yes.”

Among the hospitals that Monique looks at, for Hospital B, 86% of the patients said “yes.” This is much better than average for all hospitals. In comparison, far fewer patients in hospitals A and C said “yes.”

How to Find a Graph Like Jim's or Monique's

Go to the website: www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov

Step A: Enter your zip code, a city or state.

Step B: Select reason for admissions (such as general, medical or surgical)

Step C: **Click Find Hospitals**

Hospital Compare

Where do you want to find a hospital?

Search Information

Location - ZIP Code or City, State

e.g. 10009 or New York, NY

Search type [What is this?]

- General
- Medical Conditions
- Surgical Procedures

Find Hospitals



Tip: Blue buttons will move you to the next screen.

Select The Things You Want To See

Select up to three hospitals in the table by checking the boxes next to them.

[Click Compare](#)

Compare

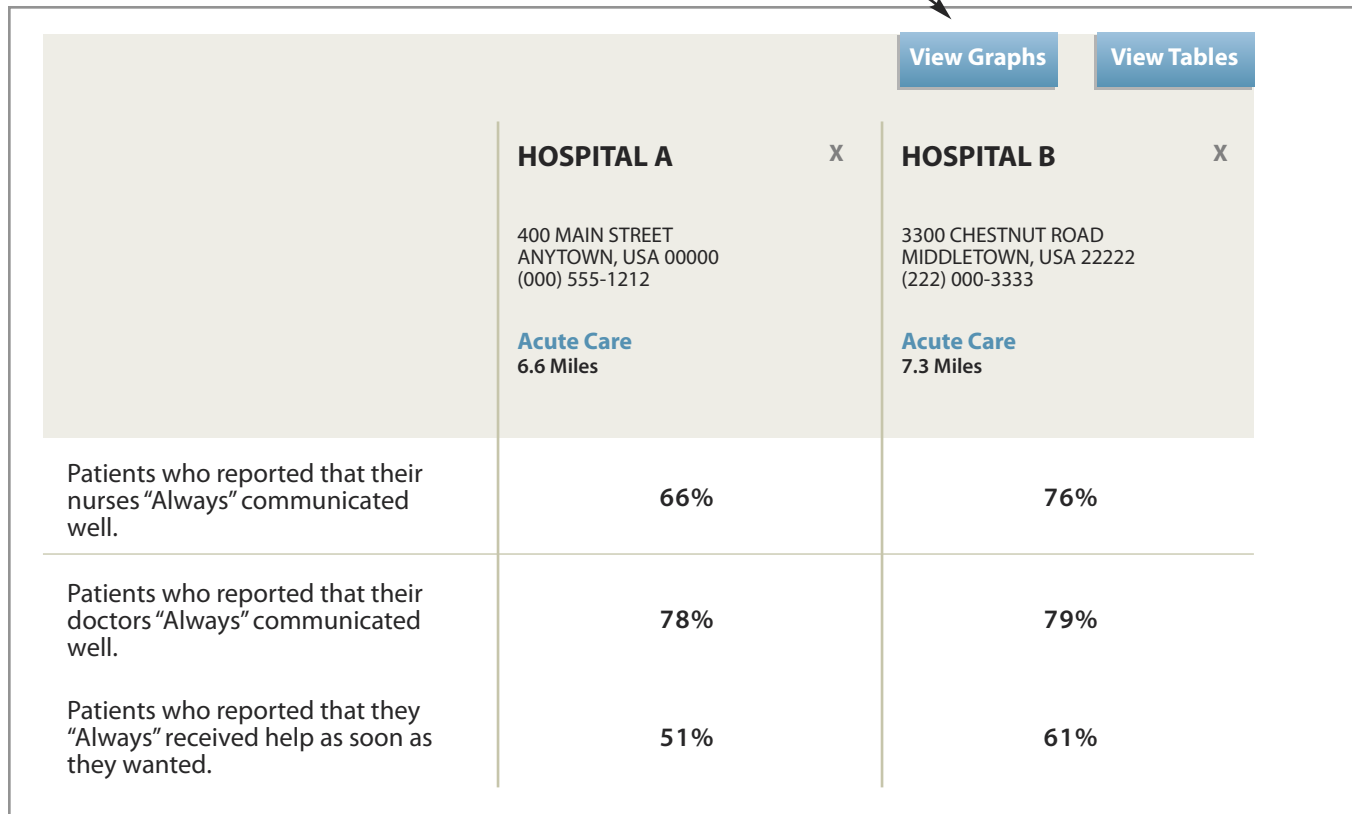
Select up to three hospitals to compare.

Your results are currently sorted by Distance.

Hospital name, address	Distance ▲	Hospital Type	Emergency Services
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>HOSPITAL A 400 MAIN STREET ANYTOWN, USA 00000 (000) 555-1212 Add to my Favorites</p>	<p>6.6 Miles </p> <p>Map & Directions</p>	<p>Acute Care</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>HOSPITAL B 3300 CHESTNUT ROAD MIDDLETOWN, USA 22222 (222) 000-3333 Add to my Favorites</p>	<p>7.3 Miles </p> <p>Map & Directions</p>	<p>Acute Care</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>HOSPITAL C 3600 NORTH DRIVE SOUTHVILLE, USA 11223 (500) 250-0000 Add to my Favorites</p>	<p>8.7 Miles </p> <p>Map & Directions</p>	<p>Acute Care</p>	<p>Yes</p>

Using the Results

Scroll down the table to see differences in quality (such as “infection rate” or “patient experience”). Select what measures to compare (such as “Doctor always communicates well”). Click [View Graphs](#)



	HOSPITAL A	X	HOSPITAL B	X
	400 MAIN STREET ANYTOWN, USA 00000 (000) 555-1212		3300 CHESTNUT ROAD MIDDLETOWN, USA 22222 (222) 000-3333	
	Acute Care 6.6 Miles		Acute Care 7.3 Miles	
Patients who reported that their nurses “Always” communicated well.	66%		76%	
Patients who reported that their doctors “Always” communicated well.	78%		79%	
Patients who reported that they “Always” received help as soon as they wanted.	51%		61%	

What To Do Now

No one is expected to choose a hospital based on these summary scores alone. **Talk with your doctors and others about what you find.** This website will give you reliable information that you can use, in addition to what you and your doctor already know about a hospital. The scores will also help you learn what aspects of care experts consider very important to the care you need. These measures are not the only things that are important, and more measures are likely to be added over time.

Questions and Answers

Q: Do I give my name or any contact information to use this website?

No. You won't be asked for either one.

Q: What can I find at Hospital Compare?

Hospital Compare provides information about such things as the following:

- Patient safety scores such as preventing infection and complications from surgery;
- Scores for treating common health conditions;
- Patient reports about their hospital experience;
- Death rates; and
- The number of patients treated for this problem.

Q: Can I trust this information?

Yes. The results are reliable, since they are checked for accuracy and updated when new results come in. The scores also take into account that certain hospitals serve a larger number of sicker patients than other hospitals.

Q: What are measures and where do they come from?

National experts in medicine and hospital quality and the federal government's lead agency for health care quality chose the measures. They are things that experts agree are important, such as the number of "surgery patients who received medicine to prevent blood clots."

When deciding what measures to include, the group got help from patients, hospitals, unions, AARP (the association representing retirees), quality experts, employers and others.

They picked information that can give an accurate picture of the quality and safety of care at different hospitals. They also asked people like you if they would want this information, and the answer was "yes!"

Q: What is meant by a score?

A simple percentage, such as 80%. It shows how often a hospital does things that experts agree are important. The best hospitals can score 100%. This is all you need to know to use this website.

Q: What is quality?

Quality is something we look for every day: quality schools for our children, quality products to buy, quality time with our families. And, last—but certainly not least—quality health care.

Quality in health care is doing the right thing—at the right time—in the right way—with the best possible results.

The "right thing" means doing what is helpful and avoiding what is not helpful based on the best research. At the "right time" means no harmful delays. The "best possible results" means things such as the following:

- Getting results that are important to you;
- Avoiding complications, injuries or readmission to the hospital;
- Having a good experience (both you and your family) with the hospital and staff; and
- Surviving.

Q: What is patient safety?

Preventing possible harm from events such as infection, injury or mix-ups with medications.

Q: Are there really differences in the quality of hospitals?

Yes. There are important differences in quality that can affect how well you do and how likely it is you will have complications. Some differences are quite large.

Q: How big a difference is important?

Some differences, for example, 81% versus 84%, do not seem important, and this may be true, especially for small hospitals.

For larger hospitals, such as those that have measured care for 100 or more patients, differences in scores can be important signs about quality.

For example, if a hospital has measured 100 patients and its score is 70%, but another hospital with a similar number of patients scores 60% or 80%, that difference is probably not due to chance.

CAUTION: If the scores for a hospital are high or low in one group of measures, it doesn't mean that everything in the hospital is the same. No hospital is perfect, and may vary in quality depending on what condition or procedure a patient has.

Q: What does a patient survey tell me?

What patients said when asked questions about their care in the hospital. The patient surveys apply to the whole hospital and are based on answers from a broad range of patients.

Q: What do mortality (death) rates tell me?

The number of patients who died while in the hospital, or within 30 days after leaving the hospital. Even in the best hospitals, some patients will die because they are very sick. A rate shows how many patients died compared to the number who would be likely to die given how sick they were. Some hospitals do better than expected, and some do worse. A score of 1 means the number of patients who died is about what was expected. A score of 2 means that twice as many patients died as expected.

Resources: Where to Go for More Information

Medical information can be hard to understand. The Hospital Compare website has many links to help you understand what words mean and why a measure is important. Keep an eye out for links in the right-hand area and at the top and bottom of each page. Also listed here are other free, reliable websites that provide useful information.

Quality Check

www.QualityCheck.org This website is offered by the Joint Commission, a group that certifies and accredits hospitals. You can see summary scores there that rate hospitals across several measures for a single medical condition.

Why Not the Best

www.whynotthebest.org This website is put together by the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation working toward creating a better health care system. It tracks hospital performance on various measures of health care quality.

Questions Are the Answer

www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer/ This website has tips on how and why to ask questions of your doctor or other health care provider. It includes a checklist of questions to ask in different situations. You can customize and print your own list of questions to take with you to a medical visit. The website is run by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Having Surgery? What You Need to Know

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/surgery/surgery.htm This guide is for people who are having non-emergency surgery. The purpose is to help people become better informed about issues they should consider and questions they should ask before surgery.

Your Medicine: Play it Safe

www.ahrq.gov/consumer/safemeds/safemeds.htm This guide provides information on how to take medicines safely. It answers questions about getting and taking medicines, and it has forms to help people keep track of what they are taking.

In addition, your state may have a website where additional information on the safety, quality and cost of hospitals is provided.

Speak Up

www.jointcommission.org/patientsafety/speakup/ This website, run by the Joint Commission, provides materials to help you ask the right questions and be more actively involved in your care.



Choosing the Right Hospital: A Guide is a product of the National Business Group on Health. The Business Group is the nation's only nonprofit organization devoted exclusively to representing large employers' perspectives on national health policy issues and to providing practical solutions to the most important health care problems these employers face. Business Group members are primarily Fortune 500 companies and large public sector employers who provide health coverage for more than 50 million U.S. workers, retirees and their families. Members are actively engaged in controlling employee health care costs, improving systemically patient safety and quality of care, and sharing best practices in health benefits management.

The guide was developed for members of the Business Group to use with their employees. It is provided as a reference tool to help people navigate a website called Hospital Compare, which is one of the most reliable sources of information on the quality of care provided in hospitals. Employees can use this guide to learn how the quality of care provided at hospitals near them is rated and to determine where they should go for care, when they have a choice.

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