

How to Request Medical Care in TDCJ
By Scott Medlock, Director, Prisoners' Rights Program
Texas Civil Rights Project

1. **Place a sick call**—complete a sick call form, clearly describing what your medical problem is. You do not need to use legal jargon like “deliberate indifference”—just tell the medical staff what your problem is and why you want to be seen. Sick call forms are available on your housing unit.

TDCJ policy requires all sick calls be answered within 48 hours. If you have not received an answer within 48 hours, proceed to the next step. See Correctional Managed Care Policy 38.1.

2. **Make an I-60 request**—If you are not seen after placing a sick call, complete an I-60 requesting medical care. An I-60 is a request to prison officials, and the form is available on your housing unit. Clearly describe the problem, and state you have already completed a sick call. Tell the person who will read the I-60 that you want to be seen by medical staff. Again, there is no need to use legal jargon.
3. **File Step 1 and Step 2 Grievances**—If you are not seen after placing the sick call and making the I-60 request, file a grievance. Make sure to file the rules regarding filing grievances carefully. Consult your Offender Handbook for instructions on filing a grievance. Grievance forms are available on your housing unit and at the law library. Again, there is no need to use legal jargon.

When filing the grievance:

- Only write about the issue you want help with. Each grievance can only address one problem. If you have more than one problem, write a different grievance for each problem. Remember you can only file one grievance per week, so you have to prioritize.
- When you write the grievance, explain who you talked to and what they did (if anything) about your problem. Write that you filled out a sick call request and made an I-60 request.
- Be sure to file your grievance within 15 days of learning about the problem, or as soon as possible.
- Make sure you include how you would like to have the problem solved. For example, if you are sick and need to see a doctor, write “I want to see a doctor.”
- Do not use indecent, vulgar, or threatening language. TDCJ has the right to refuse to process a grievance with bad language.

If your Step 1 grievance is denied, then file a Step 2 grievance. If TDCJ does not respond to your grievance after 40 days without telling you a response is coming, you can file a Step 2. The Step 2 grievance will be reviewed by TDCJ Health Services staff.

- You must file a Step 2 grievance within 15 days of receiving the response to your Step 1 grievance. TDCJ has 35 more days to answer a Step 2 grievance.

4. **Contact TDCJ Health Services directly**—The Health Services Division's Office of Professional Standards investigates prisoners' complaints about health care. Their address is:

Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Health Services Division
3009-A HWY 30 West
Huntsville, Texas 77340-0769

If you have a friend or family member in the free world, they can call Health Services directly at (936) 437-4271. Health Services may require you to execute a medical release before they can talk with your friends or family. This is to protect your medical privacy. You can get the release form from the medical department on your unit. (The form needs to be renewed and updated every six months.)

A friend or family member can also contact the TDCJ Ombudsman at (936) 437-6791. The Ombudsman will also likely require your family to have a medical release to protect your privacy.

Make sure to document each of the above steps by saving copies of the forms or writing in a diary when you made the requests.

If you can afford to be seen by a free world doctor, you have a right to have one evaluate you. Correctional Managed Health Care Policy E-44.2. You will have to pay all the costs associated with this visit, however, and will have to find a doctor willing to come to the prison to visit you.

If all else fails, you can try to contact a lawyer for help, or file a lawsuit yourself. It is very difficult for a prisoner to win a lawsuit, even if he or she has a lawyer, so you should always try to find a lawyer before going to court yourself. Lawyers' addresses can be found in the directories in the law library.

*** This information is not a substitute for speaking with a lawyer. Before filing a lawsuit, always consult an attorney. This information is not a substitute for a lawyer's advice.*