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## **St George and Sutherland Hospital emergency departments filling up as cold weather sets in**

Winter has just begun, and front line staff who work in the emergency departments at St George and Sutherland Hospitals have been treating high numbers of patients with chronic conditions, including respiratory and infectious illnesses.

St George Hospital's emergency department – a major trauma centre and already one of the State's busiest – has treated 7,755 patients and admitted 2,705 patients in the six weeks, from 6 May to 16 June. At Sutherland Hospital, there have been 5,568 presentations to the emergency department and 1,443 admissions for the same period.

Dr Trevor Chan, emergency department director, St George Hospital and David Mah, acting emergency department director, Sutherland Hospital have urged patients with non-urgent conditions to avoid going to the emergency department. Instead, patients with non-urgent conditions should attend a 24-hour GP clinic or contact the 24-hour free hotline *Healthdirect* Australia on 1800 022 222, which is manned by a registered nurse.

Dr Trevor Chan said during busy periods, emergency department staff execute a specialist escalation plan to minimise waiting times for both patients and ambulances.

“Both St George and Sutherland Hospitals have a winter bed strategy and dedicated patient flow teams work around the clock to facilitate timely access. Additionally, staff continue to work in close consultation with ambulance officers to ensure that patients are seen and treated as soon as possible,” Dr Chan said.

“When a large influx of patients attend the emergency department over a short period of time they are triaged accordingly, and sometimes, waits for less urgent presentations are unavoidable.

“Of course, patients that are most seriously ill are always treated as a priority,” he said.

Patients who are experiencing heart and breathing problems or who need urgent medical attention should always attend their emergency department or contact Triple 0.

Dr David Mah said Sutherland Hospital has experienced increased demand recently as the elderly and those with chronic health conditions become more vulnerable.

“The recent cold, wet weather has seen an increase in the number of patients with chronic conditions presenting to hospital and many of these cases require complex treatment plans,” Dr Mah said.

“Emergency departments are busy places, particularly during the winter months but emergency patients will continue to be seen as quickly as possible. Our expert clinical staff are highly professional and will always work to provide the best possible care,” Dr Mah said.

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