

19 December 2018

Prince of Wales Hospital urges caution over the festive season

With the holiday season kicking off, staff at the Prince of Wales Hospital Emergency Department are preparing for their busiest fortnight of the year.

The Christmas period last year saw almost 3,000 visits to the Emergency Department between 24 December 2017 and 7 January 2018 – an increase of more than 4 per cent on the previous year.

Dr David Murphy, Co-Director, Emergency Department, said he urged people to exercise caution to ensure necessary precautions are taken to ensure safety for themselves and family over the holiday season.

“On New Year’s Day this year we had 228 people presenting to the Emergency Department. This was the busiest day of the year, and there were a number of incidents that could have been prevented,” Dr Murphy said.

Presentations during the festive season are often varied, and include an increase in major trauma cases, as well as less immediate issues.

Dr Murphy said major trauma cases are likely to peak during the festive period, with young males accounting for over a quarter of cases. This was often in parallel to excessive alcohol consumption and an increase in risk taking behaviour.

All community members are encouraged to be proactive in ensuring a happy and healthy holiday season by:

- Visiting their GP in the lead up to Christmas, and ensuring they have an adequate supply of prescription medications
- Taking additional care on the roads and whilst participating in outdoor recreational activities
- Ensuring that Christmas gifts, including bikes and skateboards are accompanied with protective equipment such as helmets and knee pads
- Keeping a close eye on elderly relatives with impaired mobility in unfamiliar surroundings
- Maintaining regular contact with the socially isolated
- Taking precautions on very hot days, such as maintaining hydration, minimising physical activity, wearing light clothing, avoiding alcohol, and staying indoors between 11am and 5pm, ideally in air conditioning
- Supervising and keeping a watchful eye on children, particularly around water

- Refrigerating food immediately, throwing out leftovers and carefully cleaning food preparation surfaces
- Washing hands with soap and water before eating and preparing food, after using the toilet and after changing nappies
- Moderating the consumption of alcohol, particularly on New Year's Eve

Patients with less urgent conditions are encouraged to consider alternatives to the Emergency Department, such as the after-hours GP clinics, home doctor services, or the free 24-hour *Healthdirect* Australia hotline (**1800 022 222**), which is manned by a registered nurse.

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

"On behalf of Prince of Wales Hospital, we wish everyone a Merry Christmas and encourage them to take the necessary precautions to ensure a safe and happy holiday season," Dr Murphy said.