

5 December, 2012

Here's to a healthy and safe holiday season

The Emergency Departments at St George and Sutherland Hospitals are preparing for the annual festive season peak in activity, during which increased presentations of up to 40 per cent have been experienced in previous years.

According to Dr Peter Grant, Senior Staff Specialist, Emergency Department, St George Hospital, patients attend the Emergency Department over the festive season for a wide variety of reasons.

"We treat children who have suffered injuries due to accidents involving toys, skateboards, and bikes, and elderly patients suffering falls or other mishaps in the unfamiliar environment of relatives' homes," Dr Grant said.

"An increase in mental health presentations may also occur, as Christmas can be a lonely time for the socially isolated," he said.

"Patients transported by road ambulance or airlifted to Hospital with major trauma also peaks over the Christmas and New Year period, with one quarter of cases involving patients aged from 16 to 24, and more common in males.

"Additionally, summer heatwave conditions can lead to heat-related presentations, particularly for elderly patients or those with chronic medical conditions," Dr Grant said.

The public are encouraged to be proactive in avoiding Emergency Department attendance over the Christmas and New Year period by:

- Taking additional care on the roads and while participating in outdoor recreational activities.
- Ensuring that Christmas gifts such as bikes and skateboards are accompanied with protective equipment such as helmets and knee pads and are used under appropriate supervision
- Keeping a close eye on elderly relatives with impaired mobility in unfamiliar surroundings, and ensuring that they have an adequate supply of prescription medications to last the holiday period.
- Making regular checks on the well-being of the socially isolated.
- Taking precautions on very hot days such as maintaining hydration, minimising physical activity, wearing light clothing and avoiding alcohol. Staying indoors between 11am and 5pm, ideally in an air-conditioned environment, is also advised.
- Moderating alcohol consumption, particularly on New Year's Eve.

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

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