

17 December 2018

## **St George and Sutherland Hospitals urge caution over the festive season**

With the holiday season kicking off, staff at the Emergency Departments at St George and Sutherland Hospitals are preparing for their busiest fortnight of the year.

The Christmas period last year saw 3,440 presentations to the St George Emergency Department between 24 December, 2017 and 7 January, 2018. Presentations peaked on 1 January 2018 where a total of 278 patients presented to the Emergency Department with 69 patients admitted.

There were 2,313 presentations to the Sutherland Hospital Emergency Department, and the busiest day occurred on 24 December, with 176 presentations within 24 hours.

Dr Peter Grant, Senior Staff Specialist, Emergency Department, St George Hospital, said he urged people to exercise precautions to ensure safety for themselves and family over the holiday season.

“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.

“Major trauma cases are likely to peak during the festive period, with young males accounting for over a quarter of cases. These presentations are often linked to excessive alcohol consumption and an increase in risk taking behaviour.”

Dr Andrew Finckh, Director, Department of Emergency Medicine, Sutherland Hospital, said some patients may attend the Emergency Department over the festive season due to inability to access their usual health care provider or due to limited social support.

“We usually see an increase in cases of gastroenteritis between Christmas and New Year, many of which may have been preventable through simple measures such as good food hygiene, adequate refrigeration, and close attention to hand washing,” Dr Finckh said.

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

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.