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HOW TO KEEP OUT OF THE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT THIS SUMMER

Doctors are urging North Shore residents to play it safe these summer holidays to help prevent trips to the Emergency Department (ED) during what can be its busiest period of the year.

Last summer, Royal North Shore's ED saw an average of 225 patients a day in December (2015) and 212 a day in January (2016). One quarter of these patients were children. Over the Christmas-New Year holiday period there was an average of 243 presentations to the ED each day.

Emergency Department director Dr Robert Day said the summer holidays could be one of the busiest times of the year, but simple precautions could prevent unwanted trips to the ED.

"Our ED is very busy and our dedicated staff work hard to ensure patients receive the best care they can get – but a visit to the ED is not really what anyone wants over the holiday break," he said.

Dr Day said new toys, too much alcohol, or even Christmas decorations could result in a stressful but avoidable trip to the ED.

"Too much alcohol can make common or slightly risky activities even more hazardous," he said.

"Sparkly decorations can be choking hazards for small children, and Christmas trees can topple on them if they're not properly secured."

Dr Day said active new toys such as skateboards and bikes should come with helmets, protective gear, and careful instruction and supervision.

He urged people who relied on prescription medication to ensure they had sufficient repeats before their GPs took a holiday break.

Dr Day said many GP surgeries closed over the festive season and several public holidays between Christmas and the New Year, and people could find themselves short on medication if they failed to plan ahead.

"In all the hustle and bustle of Christmas activity, it is easy to forget to check if you have enough medication or have repeat prescriptions," Dr Day said.

"Every year we see patients visiting the ED to get repeat prescriptions for medications to treat chronic conditions like diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure. EDs get very busy and these patients can be in for a long wait, so it's best avoided by planning ahead."

Dr Day said people seeking non-urgent care should first contact their GP, or phone Health Direct on 1800 022 222 to speak with a registered nurse who may be able to offer advice and health information.

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