

For immediate release
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Tips for avoiding non-essential trips to the emergency department over the holidays

With family doctor offices and urgent care centres closing or reducing hours over the holidays, many people think emergency departments are the only option for those seeking non-urgent medical attention between Christmas and the New Year. This can lead to longer than usual waits for healthier patients, or those who don't require immediate emergency care.

Holiday emergency department visits historically climb by up to 15 per cent at Grand River Hospital and St. Mary's General Hospital. Emergency departments remain appropriately staffed during the season. By being prepared, people may avoid an emergency visit completely or greatly improve their experience if they need care over the holidays.

Here are some tips to help avoid a non-essential emergency department visit:

- Practice good hand hygiene, which is the single most effective method of preventing transmission of infection.
- Make sure everyone in your family has enough medications (both prescription and non-prescription) to get through the holidays.
- Keep medication, alcohol and tobacco products out of the reach of children. Homes are often busy, with additional people and less supervision for young members of the family. It is important to be more careful and vigilant where young children are concerned.
- Make sure all medical equipment (such as inhalers, respirators, glucometers and diabetic supplies) is in good working order.
- Ask your doctor's office about its holiday hours and what back-up coverage it offers or recommends when the office is closed.
- Find out locations and hours for local walk-in clinics. Those locations are available at: www.grhosp.on.ca/ed-wait-times and <http://www.smgh.ca/ed-wait-times/>.
- Know where to find the nearest 24-hour pharmacy.

Not all visits will be avoidable. An influx of patients could lead to longer than usual wait times for non-urgent care. Staff and physicians will do their best to see patients as quickly as possible, but the departments could be very busy. As always, patients will be seen by a doctor based on the severity of their illness.

If an emergency visit is necessary remember the following:

- Bring your OHIP card or other medical insurance information;
- Bring a list or supply of your current medications;
- If you are coming to the department with a child, bring diapers, blankets and comfort items;
- If you have a new or worse cough or shortness of breath, put on a mask and use hand sanitizer when you arrive in the department. If you are feeling feverish, tell the receptionist or nurse right away; and
- If you need to visit, try to bring only essential visitors with you.

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