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Press release

South Tyneside residents urged to go to A&E for serious health emergencies only

South Tyneside's NHS has called on people in the borough to only use Accident and Emergency services for serious health emergencies.

The appeal follows severe pressure on health services over the past two weeks, with an increase in respiratory illnesses leading to the busiest Christmas in years for the NHS in the North East.

Dr Matthew Walmsley, Chair of NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), said: "Hospitals and A&E departments are under severe pressure, and it's more important than ever that only people who need emergency medical help attend them.

"GP practices are all open as normal after the Christmas period, and there are other options for less urgent medical concerns including walk-in centres and the NHS 111 service. Local pharmacists are also expert in advising on common winter illnesses.

"If you are normally fit and well, you can help our doctors, nurses and paramedics by thinking carefully about other NHS services before calling 999 or going to A&E. The NHS belongs to all of us, and everyone can help to ease the pressure and ensure that services are available for people who need them most.

"Things like colds, sore throats, headaches, hangovers, upset stomachs, coughs, aches, pains, and winter vomiting should all be treated at home or with the advice of a pharmacist, with pain killers, rest and plenty of fluids."

High numbers of poorly older people with respiratory illnesses are seeing increased admissions to hospital across the region, which means long waiting times and some cancelled operations.

This is in addition to seasonal increases in demand for NHS services as cold weather means there are more slips, trips and injuries. Generally more people feel unwell during the winter as they spend more time indoors, and coughs and colds are passed around the family, friends and colleagues at work.

"NHS services are under severe pressure but we have strong processes in place across the North East to monitor and manage them. Local people have a vital role to play in that, by keeping A&E and the 999 service for serious emergencies like major accidents, broken bones, breathing problems, severe chest pains, unconsciousness, severe blood loss or suspected stroke," said Dr Walmsley.

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Chief Operating Officer Steve Williamson said: "The heavy demand on emergency services is not unique to South Tyneside District Hospital and is, in fact, being experienced at various hospitals in the North East and across the country.

"Not only are our A&E attendances up but we are also dealing with high numbers of complex, severe cases, including older people with respiratory illnesses who require admission.

Despite these pressures, our dedicated, hardworking staff continue daily to provide care of the very highest standard and we are extremely proud of them. The public can play their part in alleviating the pressure by choosing the right NHS service. A&E is for patients whose condition is critical or life-threatening. By staying at home and treating themselves with pain killers, rest and plenty of fluids, those with common ailments are not only easing the strain on our emergency services but are reducing the spread of viruses to vulnerable patients in NHS waiting rooms and leaving appointments available for those with serious health conditions who need to see a doctor or nurse. We very much appreciate the public's help in this regard."

Advice on how to treat a range of common winter conditions by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home or speaking to your local pharmacist is available at keepcalmthiswinter.org.uk or [@keepcalmne](https://twitter.com/keepcalmne).

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