

## **PRESS RELEASE – Thursday 5 January 2017**

### **Warning from region’s hospital bosses on misuse of A&E services**

Health bosses in the north east have issued a stark warning to members of the public who are misusing emergency NHS services, putting unnecessary pressure on hospitals and putting more seriously ill patients at risk.

Between 1 December and Christmas Day, over 53,000 people attended major A&E departments in hospitals across the north east\* yet less than 30%, just over 15,000 people, actually needed admission to hospital for emergency treatment.

Emergency hospital teams are calling upon the public to stop misusing A&E services for minor ailments which are not serious or life threatening. Examples over the festive season from right across the north east include people attending A&E with:

- backache
- toothache
- broken finger nails
- excessive alcohol consumption
- coughs, colds and sore throats
- sickness and diarrhoea.

Mr David Evans chairs one of the region’s A&E delivery boards and is chief executive of Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. On behalf of all NHS providers in the north east, he said: “Emergency departments right across the region are extremely busy and people must start taking accountability for their actions and the impact this has on the NHS.

“Our message is very simple, if it is not a serious or life threatening emergency then please do not waste the time of busy hospital teams or 999 services who are there to look after patients who are very sick and who do need immediate medical help.

“Many of the attendances the region’s hospitals are seeing are for common winter illnesses such as bad colds, viruses or stomach bugs which always circulate in the community at this time of year. These are best looked after at home with over the counter medication, plenty of fluids, rest and recuperation - they certainly do not need a trip to A&E.”

The NHS always sees a rise in emergency admissions to hospital at this time of year, particularly amongst older people, who are much more susceptible to serious illness or injury during the cold winter months. For every inappropriate A&E attendance – a broken finger nail, a sore throat or a stomach bug - the attention of hospital staff is pulled away from caring for those who really do need immediate and potentially lifesaving help.

Emergency 999 calls have also risen by a third in the last two weeks, putting enormous pressure on the North East Ambulance Service. Chief operating officer, Paul Liversidge, said: "We are currently experiencing unprecedented demand and are prioritising our response to those whose life is most at risk. The public can help us reach those patients who need us most by only dialling 999 in the event of a serious emergency. Patients without a potentially life threatening condition are likely to wait longer than usual for an ambulance response.”

Mr Evans added: “Every year the NHS makes the same plea to the public and every year we continue to see inappropriate A&E attendances rise. For too long, A&E has become the default option for too many people and this simply has to change for the future of the NHS.

“Our emergency system is without doubt the best in the world but we need to keep it that way and keep 999 and emergency care free to do what the NHS does best. This starts with people taking more accountability. We are appealing to the public conscience today and for everyone to really think about how use services.”

The region's NHS is reminding the public that your GP should always be the first port of call for most medical problems unless it is a serious or life threatening emergency. If in doubt, the free NHS 111 number is available 24/7 for expert medical advice.

Healthcare leaders in the north east are also backing the national Stay Well This Winter campaign which encourages people to look after themselves well

[www.nhs.uk/staywell](http://www.nhs.uk/staywell).

## ENDS

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**\*A&E attendances at 'type 1' departments (i.e. major A&E departments) and emergency admissions to hospital (via A&E) between 1 December 2016 and 25 December 2016.**

Trust	A&E attendances	Emergency admissions to hospital via A&E	% of A&E attendances who needed emergency admission
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust	6,469	2,315	36%
County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust	8,515	2,596	30%
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust	5,987	1,384	23%
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust	4,597	1,377	30%
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	6,873	2,993	44%
South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	8,107	1,709	21%
South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust	3,902	1,017	26%
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	8,574	1,845	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,024</b>	<b>15,236</b>	<b>29%</b>

**Note** - Daily SitReps are collected from acute trusts each weekday during winter and indicate where there are any winter pressures on the service around the country. Data collection for winter 2016-17 commenced on 1st December 2016. This information above is management data which has been collected on a rapid turn-round basis from the NHS. The speed of the collection only permits minimal validation to be undertaken but the data is considered 'fit-for-purpose'.