

## PRESS RELEASE – 20 December 2017



### **Use your NHS wisely this Christmas and help the very sick**

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts are urging the public to think twice before turning up at A&E this Christmas and New Year so that the patients who really need emergency care receive the quickest possible treatment.

There is always heavy demand on emergency services during the winter as the colder weather has a significant impact on the number of people becoming ill - with people with long-term health conditions and the over 65s particularly at risk - and the festive period is particularly challenging for health services.

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Medical Director Dr Shaz Wahid said: “Our dedicated, hardworking staff do a fantastic job maintaining services and providing care of the highest quality, no matter what the pressures.

“Unfortunately, we do get large numbers of people attending A&E who could and should use other services and, inevitably, this adds to congestion and long waits. We are appealing to the public to help staff to efficiently manage the very sick people who really need to be seen in hospital by not automatically turning up at A&E.”

Throughout 2016/17, there were more than 13,000 inappropriate attendances at A&E at South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital. These included bites and stings, dental problems, sore throats, headaches, backache, ear problems and diarrhoea and vomiting. All of these things could and should have been better treated using other NHS services and not the emergency department.

Dr Wahid added: “People with injuries that are over 48 hours old, or who have had low level pain for a few days, should see their GP first. We would also encourage patients with ailments which are common at this time of year, such as coughs and colds, upset stomachs and general aches and pains, to self-care and ask their local pharmacist for advice. By staying at home and treating themselves with painkillers, rest and plenty of fluids, people are also helping to reduce 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.”

### **Tips for a happy and healthy Christmas and New Year**

- Download the NHS Child Health app from Google Play and the App Store to help you to look after your children’s health and prevent unnecessary A&E attendances. It is free and contains a wealth of advice and support for parents and carers of children aged 0 to 5. It covers everything from upset tummies and diarrhoea, to bumps and bruises
- Ask your local pharmacist. They are experts in the use of medicines and are able to diagnose and offer treatment for a range of minor illnesses and ailments immediately, without the need to make an appointment with a GP

- Stock up your medicine cabinet – make sure you have the essentials over the winter and especially over the Christmas holidays
- For medical advice needed quickly - but not an emergency - call NHS 111. You'll speak to highly trained advisors, supported by healthcare professionals, who will assess your symptoms and direct you to the best care. In some cases they will be able to book appointments for you
- Norovirus – if you have symptoms of the winter vomiting bug stay away from hospitals, care homes and schools and wait until you are symptom-free for 48 hours before you visit any public places or relatives
- GP practices in South Tyneside and Sunderland are offering hundreds of additional appointments every week on weekdays and weekends, including over Christmas and New Year. To book, call your GP practice in the usual way or, if it is out of hours, simply call the free NHS 111 number which is available 24/7 and you will be directed to the most appropriate available service

**Ends**

*Photo caption: Emergency Care staff at South Tyneside District Hospital*

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