

Sent on behalf of all NHS providers in the North East and North Cumbria

PRESS RELEASE

Monday 8 January 2018

NHS staff thanked as winter surge only just begins

NHS staff across the region are being thanked for their unwavering efforts caring for patients over Christmas and New Year, as health services across the North East and North Cumbria continue to cope well with the annual winter surge in demand.

Despite the festive period being over and many people returning to work this week, hospitals are bracing themselves for a sustained increase in pressure throughout January and beyond, as more people become unwell with seasonal illness, particularly flu, and require emergency hospital admission.

During the month of December alone, many hospitals across the region once again saw a rise in emergency care attendances with an overall increase of four per cent* (over 2,800 more attendances) when compared to December 2016.

In Sunderland and South Tyneside, almost 15,000 people arrived through the emergency department doors in December, representing over a ten per cent increase in activity compared to the same month last year. Over 6,000 of these attendances were in the ten days between Christmas and New Year. Sunderland Royal Hospital's emergency department also saw the second highest number of ambulance arrivals of all Trusts in the region during the month of December.

Hardworking frontline NHS staff have once again banded together, often at great personal sacrifice, to focus their efforts on providing safe care for patients and prioritising those with the most urgent clinical needs.

Speaking on behalf of all NHS providers in the region, Ken Bremner Chief Executive of City Hospitals Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trusts expressed his sincere thanks to everyone who has played a role in caring for patients throughout the festive period.

He said: “The last few weeks have been an extremely busy and challenging time, not only here in Sunderland and South Tyneside, but across the region as a whole. NHS staff have worked relentlessly and beyond the call of duty to provide safe patient care, despite the extreme demands on services. We should all be extremely proud of the way in which teams are pulling together, often across organisational boundaries, to effectively manage these pressures together and in the very best interests of patient care.

“Although the festivities are over, this is really just the start of the busy winter period for the NHS and for the thousands of NHS staff who work across the region. All Trusts have already done a great deal of planning and preparation to make sure we continue to cope well with the influx of very poorly patients that we expect to see at this time of year.

“There is no doubt that seasonal flu has started to take a hold in our communities and we are seeing more patients becoming seriously ill and needing to be admitted to hospital. I would urge people who have not yet had their flu jab to do so as soon as possible and to please stay away from hospital if you are experiencing any flu like symptoms which can be very easily spread.”

Seasonal flu and the winter vomiting bug ‘norovirus’ are now widely circulating in local communities. Whilst both can be unpleasant, for people who are otherwise fit and healthy, they will usually clear up with good self-care, resting, drinking plenty of fluids and taking over the counter medication.

Everyone can help reduce the pressure on the NHS this winter by looking after themselves, keeping a well-stocked medicine kit at home, using local pharmacists for expert advice and treatment for common illness and ailments or by calling NHS 111 for urgent advice and before attending hospital.

This year, there are hundreds of extra GP appointments available for those who do need to see a doctor or nurse and these are bookable by contacting your practice in the usual way or by calling NHS 111 which is available 24/7.

Parents can also search for the 'NHS child health' in the app store to get a free app developed by local doctors and nurses for advice on common childhood illnesses.

Remember, 999 and emergency care are for serious or life-threatening conditions such as chest pain, significant loss of blood, loss of consciousness, suspected stroke or breathing difficulties.

For detailed information of all available services visit www.urgentoremergency.co.uk.

ENDS

Media contact: Nichola Taylor

Nichola.Taylor@chsft.nhs.uk / 07908643513

* Figures below for all Trusts across the North East and North Cumbria relate to 'type one' emergency attendances at the region's major emergency departments for seriously ill or injured people.

Trust	December 2016 attendances	December 2017 attendances	% change
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust	8,164	8,784	7.6% increase
County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust	10,593	11,783	11.2% increase
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust	7,610	7,857	3.2% increase
Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	10,615	11,033	4% increase
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	8,619	8,419	2.3% decrease
North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	7,406	7,886	6.5% increase
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust*	5,811	4,288	26% decrease
South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	10109	10938	8% increase
South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust	4828	5597	16% increase
Region overall	73,755	76,585	4% increase

***Note** – a new urgent and emergency care system is now in place at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust which diverts more minor patients away from the Trust's 'type one' emergency department. This has successfully reduced inappropriate attendances at the emergency department, however the number of emergency admissions to hospital has continued to increase.

Flu symptoms come on very quickly and can include:

- a sudden fever – a temperature of 38C or above
- aching body
- feeling tired or exhausted
- dry, chesty cough
- sore throat
- headache
- difficulty sleeping
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- nausea and being sick

The symptoms are similar for children, but they can also get pain in their ear and appear less active.

How to treat flu yourself

To help you get better more quickly:

- rest and sleep
- keep warm
- take paracetamol or ibuprofen to lower your temperature and treat aches and pains
- drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration

People eligible for a free flu vaccine

- anyone aged 65 and over
- pregnant women
- children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or respiratory disease)
- children and adults with weakened immune systems