

PRESS RELEASE – 22 January 2019

Appeal to choose the right NHS service as emergency care in South Tyneside and Sunderland comes under pressure

South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts are appealing for the public's support to help them deal with sustained pressure on emergency care as temperatures drop this winter.

As both Trusts experience higher numbers of very ill patients in their emergency departments, they are urging people to choose the right service for their needs and only come to hospital if they have a serious or life-threatening illness or injury.

With flu circulating in the community, the Trusts are also urging those in at risk groups who are eligible for the free flu vaccine on the NHS to have the vaccination. In addition, people with flu, or other infectious illnesses such as Norovirus, are being asked to stay at home and not visit family and friends in hospital to prevent the spread of infection to vulnerable patients.

Dr Sean Fenwick, Director of Operations for South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts, said: "Winter is always a very testing time for the NHS and we really appreciate the support of people in our local communities in helping our emergency teams to treat patients with urgent and life-threatening illness and injury as quickly as possible.

"Unfortunately, we are seeing large numbers of people attending our emergency departments at Sunderland Royal Hospital and South Tyneside District Hospital who should be using other services as they do not require urgent treatment. This can lead to longer waiting times and delays in treating those in most need."

Self-care and visiting a pharmacist are options in the first instance for ailments which are common at this time of year, such as coughs and colds, upset stomachs and general aches and pains. If you really need to see a GP then they are providing more convenient appointment times for patients outside the standard working day by offering extended opening hours in the evenings and at weekends. If in doubt, the free NHS 111 number is available 24/7 for expert medical advice.

For details of opening times for local GPs and pharmacists, go to

<http://urgentoremergency.co.uk/>

How to use your NHS wisely, prevent illnesses getting worse and get well again sooner

- If you have an urgent health need but are not sure if you need A&E, 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. They can access extended hours GP appointments when your GP is full and can provide an appointment, saving you from a potentially lengthy wait.
- A flu vaccine is available for free on the NHS for those in certain at risk groups for whom it can be more severe: anyone aged 65 and over; pregnant women; children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or respiratory disease), and children and adults with weakened immune systems.
- Don't wait until you get worse, first see your local pharmacist who can provide expert, confidential advice and treatment for minor illnesses, such as sore throats, coughs, colds, upset stomach and aches and pains. Many minor ailments can be treated at home with over-the-counter medicines and a first aid kit. Stock up on paracetamol, ibuprofen, rehydration salts, bandages, plasters, thermometer etc.
- Antibiotics don't work for viruses – they can only treat bacterial infections. Illnesses like diarrhoea, vomiting, sore throats and colds are usually caused by a virus and you should normally feel better over a few days to a week. Symptoms can be treated at home with over-the-counter medicines.
- The 'NHS child health' app has been developed by doctors, health visitors and pharmacists to help parents know what to do when their child is ill. You can download it from Google Play or Apple's App Store.
- If it is life-threatening or an emergency, call 999.

ENDS

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