

Flu season continues to keep Osler emergency departments busy

Emergency departments at William Osler Health System (Osler) continue to see and treat high volumes of patients following an expected, busier-than-normal period over the holidays.

An increased volume of patients in hospital emergency departments is known as a surge, and is caused by high demand and activity due to a number of factors, including an increase in seasonal flu cases.

"This continues to be a very busy time in our emergency departments, particularly as cases of influenza in the community are increasing and reaching their peak this week," said Dr. Naveed Mohammad, vice-president of medical affairs with Osler. "Osler has continued to enact its surge plan as a result, and our staff and physicians are working diligently and compassionately to see and treat all patients in a timely manner. We are also asking for cooperation and patience from the community to help support us as we are doing our work, understanding that we are seeing high volumes of patients every day."

Osler's Brampton Civic Hospital has the busiest emergency department in the province, if not the country. Osler typically sees about 380 patients on any given day in Brampton Civic's emergency department. In December, Osler averaged about 400 patients per day, with its peak at 450 patients Dec. 26.

To help the community better understand where they might be able to seek care for less complex conditions, Osler has taken to its website to share tips and information. In addition to viewing a video explaining how the ED works, Osler website visitors can find out more about alternatives to the ED and the symptoms that should prompt patients to go directly to the ED.

"We certainly encourage those who may be concerned about their symptoms to come into the emergency department to be looked at," Mohammad said. "For those patients who need x-rays, have minor injuries or less acute minor issues like coughs or colds, you can seek care at a family care provider's office, an urgent care centre or a walk-in clinic. Osler continues to work closely with community partners to ensure options are available for care, closer to home for patients."

"Ultimately, if people feel that they need to come to the emergency department, please do so and we will do our best to see you in a timely manner," Mohammad added.

To find out more about how to make the best use of the hospital emergency department, go to www.williamoslerhs.ca

People should go to the Emergency Department if they are experiencing pains or tightness in the chest; fractures or broken bones; wounds that may need stitches; severe pain; shortness of breath; sudden severe headaches, vision problems, sudden weakness, numbness and/or tingling in the face, arm or leg, trouble speaking or dizziness; if their child is vomiting, has diarrhea and won't eat or drink; and when a baby younger than six months has a fever of more than 37.9 degrees C or 100 degrees F.

The Emergency Department may not be needed for x-rays, laboratory testing or treatment (people can visit an urgent care centre or a walk-in clinic that offers these services); or minor problems like coughs and colds, minor injuries, and more long-standing or chronic medical problems (people can get care at a family care provider's office, an urgent care centre or a walk-in clinic).

Those who are not sure can call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.