

Osler helping community prepare for medical care over the holidays

Like most hospitals across Ontario at this time of year, William Osler Health System (Osler) sees an increased number of people in its Emergency Departments (ED) at both sites.

Last year, Osler saw thousands of patients come through its EDs in the lead-up to and during the holiday period, and numbers are increasing year over year.

Emergency department planning for this time of year begins in January and involves clinical teams and leaders from across the hospital, as well as community partners, said Kiki Ferrari, executive director of clinical services at Osler. This planning and effort many months in advance is critical to ensuring we have a comprehensive plan in place to support us as we deliver safe, quality care over the holidays.

A holiday surge is caused by high demand and activity due to a number of factors: reduced hours of operation for doctor's offices and walk-in clinics, less availability of community resources, higher rates of health incidents caused by activities of the holiday season, and an increase in seasonal flu cases. All of these factors cause the community to rely more heavily on hospital emergency departments.

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, how to prepare in case medical care is needed over the holidays, and the symptoms that should prompt patients to go directly to the ED. This information is also being shared through Osler social media channels including Twitter (@OslerHealth) and its Facebook page.

Ensuring that we meet the demand is key to helping manage our volumes in January, as we will see a ripple effect of people staying longer after the holidays if we don't plan appropriately, said Ferrari. With help from our local health care partners to help the community better understand their care options, added shifts and support from our staff and physicians, and tips and information through our website and social media channels, we are doing everything we can to ensure that the community receives the care they need over this holiday season.

To find out more about how to prepare for any medical care over the holidays, go to www.williamoslerhs.ca

When to go to the Emergency Department: Pains or tightness in the chest; fractures or broken bone; wound 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 your child is vomiting, has diarrhea and won't eat or drink; when a baby younger than six months has a fever of more than 37.9 degrees C or 100 degrees F

The Emergency Department might not be needed for x-rays, laboratory testing or treatment, as one may visit an urgent care centre or a walk-in clinic that offers these services.

For 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.

And if there's doubt, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.