

December 21, 2017

Where and when to get healthcare this holiday

When it comes to staying healthy over the holidays, planning ahead is often one of the most important things you can do.

"It's a busy time of year for everyone, but sometimes people still need to access health services during the holidays," says Dr. Kathryn Armstrong, clinical director, Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) Emergency department (ED). "Many family physician offices are closed, and the urgent care and walk-in clinics have modified schedules, meaning our ED may be busier than normal and wait times may be longer than usual. At RVH we are always open – 24/7, 365 days a year – so while we hope people don't need emergency care over the holidays, we'll be here for them if they do."

If you do need to visit the ED, remember to bring your health card, along with a list of your medications and remember, patients are treated based on how urgent their condition is and not on a first-come, first-served basis.

If your condition is not an emergency, there are five walk-in clinics in Barrie. The Barrie Family Medicine Clinics are located at 125 Bell Farm Road, 121 Wellington St., 829 Big Bay Point Road and in Innisfil at 2101 Innisfil Beach Road. The hours of operation can be found online or by calling 705-726-1544. The Huronia Urgent Care Clinic is located at 480 Huronia Road and can be reached at 705-792-0933. Clinics are closed on December 25 and have modified hours during the holidays. Call the clinics or consult their websites before heading out.

Just as important as knowing where to get help is knowing when to get help.

"Always seek medical attention when you are experiencing pain or tightness in the chest, shortness of breath or when you experience a sudden drooping in your face, difficulty raising your arms, and slurred or jumbled speech," says Dr. Armstrong. "You should bring your child to the ED if he or she has significant vomiting and diarrhea with very little urination. You should also bring your young baby (under three months of age) to hospital if he or she develops a fever over 38.0 C (100.4 F) or if you have any concerns with a sick child of any age."

If you are unsure if a trip to the ED is required, you can call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000. This is a free and confidential telephone service you can call to get health advice or general health information from a registered nurse. Please note that in emergency situations, you should call 911 first as Telehealth is not a replacement.

If you have a loved one who is spending the holidays in hospital and you are unable to visit, you can send them a message through RVH's Best Wishes service which can be accessed via the RVH website.

"No matter what day it is, RVH's dedicated and skilled team is here to provide safe, high-quality care," says Janice Skot, RVH president and CEO. "We make preparations well in advance of the holidays to ensure we are adequately and appropriately staffed. This year we're also fortunate to have been able to open the new Transitional Care inpatient unit. This unit provide us with an additional 36 beds to help address capacity pressures and wait times in ED, particularly during what is forecast to be a difficult flu season."

Other tips to keep you and your family healthy:

- Ask your doctor's office what back-up coverage they recommend when they are closed, such as after-hours clinics or an on-call service
- Update emergency telephone numbers and post in a visible place, such as your refrigerator
- Make sure everyone in your family has enough medical supplies, prescription and non-prescription medications, needles, alcohol swabs, etc., and make sure inhalers, respirators, oxygen and glucose-testing machines are in good working order
- Know where the nearest 24-hour pharmacy is located
- Remind visiting family members and friends to bring their health cards or health coverage documents and an adequate supply of prescription medications with them
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly to stop the spread of germs, protecting you and your family

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