

December 20, 2013

## How and when to get healthcare this holiday

This may be 'the most wonderful time of the year', but it's important to plan ahead in order to stay healthy during the holidays.

"It's important for people to be prepared and know where to access health services during the holidays," says Dr. George Karasmanis, clinical director, RVH Emergency department. "We hope that people don't require emergency care over the holidays, but if they do, RVH's Emergency department is open. With family physician offices closed and urgent care and walk-in clinics on modified schedules, volumes may be high and the wait long in Emergency. A reminder that all patients are treated based on their acuity, not on a first-come, first-serve basis."

If you need to visit the Emergency department, remember to bring your OHIP card, along with a list of your medications. However, if your condition is non-urgent, there are five walk-in clinics in Barrie. The Bell Farm, Essa, Wellington, Yonge and Huronia Urgent Care 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 pains or tightness in the chest, shortness of breath, severe pain, or when you have sudden, severe headaches, vision problems, sudden weakness, numbness or tingling in the face, arm or leg, trouble speaking or dizziness," says Dr. Karasmanis. "You should bring your child to the Emergency department if he or she has significant vomiting and diarrhea with very little urination. You should also bring your young baby (under six 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 about whether you or a family member requires medical attention, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for free access to a registered nurse who will help with any health-related questions.

"Patient safety and the delivery of high quality care remain our top priority and we have taken great efforts to ensure we are adequately and appropriately staffed during the holiday season," says Janice Skot, RVH president and CEO. "Our dedicated and skilled team is here to provide safe, high-quality care, 24/7, 365 days a year."

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

### 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. Also 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 clean to stop the spread of germs, protecting you and your family.

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