

Media statement

13 December 2019

Keeping the Christmas cheer in check

The Christmas party season is in full swing, and while the increase in festivities, parties, family gathering and work functions can be fun, it can also be a time of excess, especially when it comes to alcohol.

The festive season is a good time to reflect on our drinking culture and the way we drink.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) Director of Addiction and Specialist Services, Richard Spence-Thomas said it's important to monitor your holiday drinking.

"Christmas is a great time to relax and meet up with family, friends and work colleagues to celebrate, but it is very easy to overindulge," Mr Spence-Thomas said.

"Excess alcohol can spoil the holiday for not only you but also for your family. We are asking that people set limits for themselves and keep an eye on how many drinks they are having."

The Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council drinking guidelines recommend healthy men and a woman, drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol related injury arising from that occasion.

SCHHS data shows minor head injuries, facial lacerations and patients reporting chest pain are among the top ten presentations to SCHHS emergency departments over the Christmas period.

"Binge drinking can have a major impact on your health such as causing damage to the liver, heart, brain and stomach. It can also have a major impact on relationships.

"Sadly, excessive alcohol use can spoil a wonderful family holiday: with emergency departments, police and mental health services becoming involved following altercations after a Christmas event turns sour. This is often a result of a 'few Christmas drinks' leading to intoxication and conflict or an incident," Mr Spence-Thomas said.

"Research tells us that even when people intend to drink responsibly, it can be difficult to stick to this plan because getting drunk is often an accepted norm, and there are often social pressures to drink."

One of the most important ways to create a less harmful drinking culture is to change the acceptance of drunkenness, and the problems that arise from occasion.

Tips to implement during the festive season and throughout the year:

- Plan some alcohol-free days

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- Keep count of your standard drinks by pouring your own drinks
- Eat before, and while, you are drinking
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non- alcoholic drinks
- Plan activities for your family that don't involve alcohol
- Set goals for yourself. New Year's is a great time to think about cutting down on the amount of alcohol you consume.
- Always arrange lifts to and from the party or call a taxi to take you home.

If you're worried your drinking habits are putting you at risk, you can assess your current level of drinking by completing this short risk assessment:

<http://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Alcohol-Your-Health/Risk-Assessment-Tool>

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Media contact: Alicia Temple | Alexia Kelly | 5202 0083 | 0408 713 747

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