Use common sense over the festive period and avoid a trip to the ED

With the festive season nearly upon us, South West health authorities have issued a call for common sense and care to prevail during the holidays.

South West Hospital and Health Service Executive Director of Medical Services Dr Chris Buck said common sense often went out the window and risk-taking behaviour seemed to explode over the Christmas-New Year period.

A total of 532 people presented to the South West’s four main emergency departments at Roma, Charleville, St George and Cunnamulla hospitals between 24 December 2015 and 1 January 2016 inclusive.

Between 24 December 2014 and 1 January 2015, the four emergency departments recorded 606 presentations.

“Traditionally, the Christmas and New Year periods can be very busy times in any emergency department,” Dr Buck said.

“We tend to see an increase in alcohol-related attendances – either in terms of people presenting intoxicated or with injuries resulting from alcohol-related behaviour such as drink-driving, fights, assaults, falls and other accidents.

“We also see the results of the risk-taking behaviour that always seems to increase during any extended public holiday period even when people aren’t intoxicated – such as people hurting themselves jumping from heights, or diving into shallow water or engaging in a whole range of larrikin behaviour that they normally wouldn’t do.

“We would ask people to consider the consequences of their actions – on themselves and others – and just try to be a little more moderate and careful in their behaviour.

“We don’t want to be killjoys; we just want people to avoid hurting themselves as much as possible.”

Dr Buck said with the warmer weather, pool use was increasing and bringing with it its own problems and risks.

“I would urge everyone with a pool at home to make sure their pools are properly fenced and that they learn the principles of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation,” he said.

“But most important of all, if there are young children involved, never leave them in or around the pool, or any body of water for that matter, unsupervised. Keep an eye on them at all times.
“It can happen so quickly. Kids are masters at slipping away when you aren’t looking and pools, creeks, ponds and the like are like magnets to them.

“And remember, never leave children – or animals – unattended in cars in the heat. Temperatures can rise very rapidly and can be fatal in a surprisingly short period of time.”

Dr Buck said South West residents also needed to plan ahead to ensure they had sufficient repeat medication prescriptions to last them through the Christmas–New Year period.

“With decreased opening hours in GP clinics during the festive season, it could be hard to get a repeat prescription if you leave it till the last minute. Pharmacies also may not be open when you want them,” he said.

“Our emergency departments will be open throughout the Christmas season but our doctors in the EDs are there to deal with emergencies.

“They will always do their best to help you out but it will decrease the pressure on them if you plan ahead and organise to have sufficient prescribed medications to see you through the Christmas season.”

Dr Buck said the warm weather during Christmas and New Year also created problems with food handling.

“There’s always a lot of food around at Christmas. But people should remember that food spoils quickly and bacteria multiply very rapidly in the heat,” he said.

“So don’t leave food lying around for long. If food has been left out for a period of time, you should think about throwing it out rather than putting it away to eat later.

“Leftovers can taste great but they can also lead to severe gastro-intestinal illness if not handled correctly.

“As a general rule, food should be kept chilled below 4 degrees Centigrade, or heated above 50 degrees.

“Food kept above 4 degrees or below 50 degrees for any period of time runs the very real risk of spoiling. So don’t take the risk. Throw it out!”

Dr Buck said just a little common sense and some compassion would make the Christmas-New Year period a pleasure for everyone and hopefully diminish the chances of ending up in an emergency department.

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