

# Hurt or sick on the holidays? Here's what to do

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t's Christmas Eve and your child is ill. Do you bundle him up and head to the nearest hospital emergency department?

That depends.

This coming holiday period is the busiest time of the year for local hospitals and health care providers want you to know that there are other options.

Heading to Emerg can be a knee-jerk reaction and not always the best choice, says Dr. Andrew Arcand, chief of the department of emergency medicine at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

Arcand suggests that your first response, if you are ill or hurt and it is not an acute crisis, should be to call your doctor's office.

Some physicians and medical clinics will be open or offering extended hours over the holidays and most

leave space in their bookings for same-day appointments, he says.

Others may not be open but have an answering machine message suggesting an on-call doctor to talk to after office hours.

A second option is the TeleHelp line - 1-866-797-0000 - a free provincial phone number offering round-the-clock advice, 365 days a year. A nurse will answer and help you decide if you should head to hospital.

A walk-in clinic is the third alternative; some will be offering holiday hours. You may be able to search your local hospital's website for the list of nearby walk-ins and their hours.

Pharmacies can also advise in a pinch. If it's 10 p.m. at night and you have a bad cold and no one to call, Arcand suggests talking with the local pharmacist for advice.



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**Markham Stouffville Hospital.**

And finally, you would be wise to think ahead about how to avoid health issues over the holidays, he says.

Wash your hands to avoid sickness, consider

road and weather conditions before driving, don't drink and drive, make sure you have snow tires and wear your seatbelt.

If you do have to go to the emergency depart-

ment, be prepared for a longer-than-usual wait time.

"It's a challenging time for health care. When everyone's on holidays, we are working harder," Arcand says.

"But if you have a real emergency or are acutely unwell, you should come to us. The point is, we're there for you, 24 hours a day, always ready to help you and we will do our best."

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