

## Health Care Column

### Helping Northerners Enjoy a Healthy Holiday Season

December 18, 2014

**By Dr. Gary Bota**  
**Emergency Department Lead, North East LHIN**

If there's something you don't want for Christmas, it's to get the flu or to have to make an urgent trip to the Emergency Department (ED). Since we all want to socialize with family and friends this time of year, minding our physical and mental health will help us to better enjoy the holidays while maintaining our energy!

As a long-time ED physician, I've helped many people of all ages cope with medical situations over holidays. I've got a few suggestions on ways fellow Northerners can be proactive to stay healthy and well...



- Get a flu vaccination. This year's holiday season is expected to be particularly challenging for the health care system with some predicting that the flu season peak will overlap with the holiday period. Flu vaccinations are available now from most family physician offices, community health centres, walk-in clinics or pharmacies. You can use a great North East health care web resource, [NorthEastHealthline.ca](http://NorthEastHealthline.ca), to find immunization locations near you -- [www.northeasthealthline.ca](http://www.northeasthealthline.ca).
- Wash your hands - and often. Remember to do this yourself, and encourage your loved ones to clean up as well, as this can be a good defense against colds and flus. Use hot water and soap and rub hands together while you hum a verse of Jingle Bells – that's at least 20 seconds!
- Renew medications early. Everyone likes to take a break over the holidays, so it's likely that your primary care provider's office won't be open as usual over the holidays. Make sure you have sufficient medications to last you from Christmas to New Year's so that you don't have to spend time in a walk-in clinic or ED just to get your prescriptions filled.
- If you do get caught in a bind without your medications ... talk to your pharmacist. As part of Ontario pharmacists expanded scope of practice, they are now able to renew or adapt some prescriptions. With the exception of narcotics, controlled and targeted drugs, pharmacists may continue a course of therapy for patients with a chronic or stable condition.
- Stay on Your Feet. Not only is this the name of our regional framework of fall prevention strategies that's being used across the North East, it's a great way to avoid outcomes that affect you and your family. Injury from falls is a leading cause of ED visits and hospitalization for seniors. To support older adults to remain living at home with a good quality of life, keep an eye .../2

- out for them by removing potential hazards from their environment like scatter rugs and protecting their health through exercise and nutrition. Consider wearing ice grippers if walking on icy surfaces.
- Consider options for non-urgent care. If you're not feeling well and your situation is non-urgent, there are several options for care beyond your local emergency department. Contact your family physician – they know you best. Check the location of the nearest walk-in clinic or get free access to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the Telehealth Ontario service at 1-866-797-0000 or (TTY): 1-866-797-0007.
- Plan your party protocol. Never go to a party on an empty stomach, because you may be tempted to overindulge. Always drink a glass of water between drinks with alcohol. Guidelines from the Centre of Research and Addictions recommend healthy adults space drinks an hour apart, and drink no more than two per occasion for women and three for men. People over the age of 65 tend to have less ability to process the alcohol, so take extra precaution.

On behalf of my colleagues here in Northeastern Ontario who provide you with health care throughout the year, I wish you and yours the very best of health and happiness for the holiday season.

***Dr. Gary Bota has been an emergency physician in Sudbury for the past 31 years. He began his role as Emergency Department Lead with the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN) in April 2014 and continues to champion improvements in emergency service delivery for Northerners. His early research concentrated on Northern issues – in particular injury prevention on our roads, snowmobile trails and hockey rinks.***