Stay alive this holiday season

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Surgeons from across New Zealand are urging caution and restraint in regard to speed, alcohol and road safety awareness this holiday season, in what is traditionally a busy time for emergency departments across the country.

Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) New Zealand Trauma Committee, Mr Li Hsee, says that end of year festivities and an increase in the number of travellers on the road will likely contribute to a number of accidents over the coming weeks.

“2015 has been a relatively bad year for road fatalities,” Mr Hsee said. “This time last year, 52 people were killed on New Zealand roads in between December and January - 16 of which were over the Christmas and New Year period alone.”

On New Zealand roads, nearly one in three crashes involves speed as a factor.

“Speed isn’t just dangerous when a driver exceeds the legal limit - driving too fast for the conditions also contributes to a large number of crashes in New Zealand.”

“Quite simply, the faster you drive, the more likely you are to crash and the greater the risk of serious injury or death. When speed is combined with alcohol, the chances of causing an accident are considerably worse.”

Every year, alcohol plays a large role in the number of road fatalities in New Zealand, with one in four deaths involving alcohol consumption.

“The holidays are a time to celebrate with friends and family, but please don’t underestimate the danger of drinking and driving. Even a small amount of alcohol can substantially increase the risk of an accident.”

RACS has also warned this year of other road-related dangers such as driving and talking or texting on the phone, significant factors in many crashes.

“Motorcyclists are also a high risk category for road trauma, and even though the weather might be warming up, people should know that in the event of a crash, around half of all injured riders sustain leg injuries,” Mr Hsee said.

“Protective clothing may not be as comfortable or stylish as you’d like, but the New Zealand rate of motorcyclist deaths is around 21 times the rate for car occupants.

“Motorcyclists are grossly over-represented in road trauma statistics - around half of all injured riders sustain leg injuries and protective clothing can make all the difference.”

The financial cost of road trauma in New Zealand is more than $3 billion per year.

“The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season this year. However if you are on the roads, drive to the conditions, avoid distractions, and if you do drink, please don’t drive,” Mr Hsee said.

About RACS

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RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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