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Christchurch hospital's emergency department went into critical overload for several hours this week as it dealt with hundreds of patients and staff absences. The hospital says it's prepared for the weekend ahead. But as Donna Marie Lever explains, the growing demand on the department's fuelling calls for a second hospital in the city.

Christchurch ED in critical overload or code red for four hours this week. Almost 500 patients arrived on Monday, but sickness saw staff numbers down and services stretched.

Emergency specialist Dr Dominic Fleischer says we're cramming in so many patients that you block the corridors. You can't move patients past them. I've never seen that happen. We didn't do that during the earthquake or the Mosque shooting. To jam that many patients in corridors and expect that you'll keep them in corridors.

Emergency Department clinical director Dr James Weaver says the Code Red really is a trigger for us to enable us to pull in extra resources.

And they did aware more patients head to the emergency department every year.

Fleischer says you can arrive in the morning and patients have been there since the night before and seen that's disasters waiting to happen.

Weaver says there is pressure, there's no doubt about that. There's pressure across all the EDs across New Zealand and Australia and around the world. So there will be periods where there will be a high degree of pressure within our department.

Usually on a Sunday or Monday, the busiest days of the week. Health New Zealand says it has prepared for the seasonal spike by boosting staff numbers, support services and adding a winter ward with 20 extra beds.

Fleischer says there's a lot of innovative ideas, but it's not having a meaningful impact. We're worse than we ever have been before.

The hospital servicing a city of more than 400,000 and often taking the wider south island surplus.

New Zealand Nurses Organisation NZNO delegate Al Dietschin says it's looking like it's time that we probably need a second hospital or at least a second emergency department. I mean, the only other facility that's open 24 seven is Pegasus. And that, you know, like yesterday had a seven hour wait.

Weaver says typically the next couple of months will be our real pinch point over the winter and that is when the most pressure is on the health system.

Emergency staff reminding the public to still head to hospital if you're unwell, but to be patient with priority cases likely to be seen first.