

Flu spike delays surgeries

700 put off in 4 weeks

More than 700 Aucklanders had their elective surgeries postponed in just four weeks as the city's hospitals struggle to cope with more patients flooding through their emergency departments.

Across Auckland City, Middlemore, Waitakere and North Shore hospitals, 320 more elective surgeries were postponed in a four-week period from mid-June to mid-July than during the same period last year.

The hospitals said it was largely because of unusually high numbers of acutely unwell people arriving at the hospitals. During the same period the four hospitals saw an extra 2336 people arrive in the emergency department compared with last year.

Last month all four hospitals asked people to stay away unless it was an emergency to help make

At a glance

- More than 700 Aucklanders had their elective surgeries postponed in four weeks as hospitals struggle to cope with the increase in patients flooding their emergency departments.
- With thousands of extra patients needing immediate attention for serious illnesses, the only way hospitals can treat those people is to put off non-essential surgeries like hip replacements and cataract removal.
- A spike in the number of severe cases of the flu seems to be behind the jump, but with August typically the busiest month it is possible hospitals will continue to feel the pinch.

department had seen 7 per cent growth on last year; while the inpatient unit was up 3 per cent.

for treatment but staff were working to minimise the flow-on effect, she said.

The number of patients coming through the Auckland City emergency department in recent days had dropped, but with August usually the busiest month for the city's hospitals it was too early to say what was in store for the rest of winter.

Counties Manukau director of hospital services Phillip Balmer said every winter beds were reallocated between services to meet the heavier medical demand.

"This year demand has been much higher than anticipated."

During the four-week period there were an extra 147 people on the waiting list for acute procedures compared with last year.

Unusually, the number of people arriving with flu-like symptoms started earlier this year, he said.

A Waitemata DHB spokesperson



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Killer disease strikes Bay



PHOTO/GETTY

Influenza has been named as the primary cause of death for several Bay residents in the last fortnight

FULL STORY
PAGES 2 & 3