

For immediate Press Release

Christmas Lights and Epilepsy

The Caritas Malta Epilepsy Association would like to sensitize local councils, establishments, shops and the public in general to take heed of the problems that flashing Christmas lights can cause by inducing photosensitive epilepsy.

Photosensitive epilepsy is the name given to epilepsy in which seizures are provoked by flashing or flickering light, or some shapes or patterns. Both natural and artificial light may trigger seizures. Various types of seizures may be triggered by flickering lights.

Most people with photosensitive epilepsy are sensitive to 16-25 Hz ie 16-25 flashes per second, although some people may be sensitive to rates as low as 3 Hz and as high as 60 Hz. Several are aware of the possibility of inducing photosensitive epilepsy through flash photography, certain computer games and also television programmes, yet few realise that flashing Christmas lights in public places too can cause photosensitive epilepsy.

The EU has recently issued a warning on Christmas lights, with consumers being warned to be extra vigilant when buying Christmas lights, following publication of a Commission report which revealed some 30% randomly tested products failed basic safety checks. The main risks highlighted were from electric shocks and fire outbreaks. Inducing photosensitive epilepsy is also a health and safety issue and thus Christmas lights should not flicker at a rate which could trigger seizures in the vast majority of people with photosensitive epilepsy.