



UK Health  
Security  
Agency

## Cold weather communications toolkit 2023/24

### Supporting document for the Adverse Weather and Health Plan

#### Background

This toolkit supports UKHSA's [Adverse Weather and Health Plan](#) (AWHP) and the updated Cold-Health Alerting (CHA) service. This is the second toolkit for stakeholders for communicating in periods of adverse weather, with the last one being from June for hot weather.

The communication material in this toolkit relates specifically to cold weather and is intended to provide basic health information that can be communicated during cold spells so that the right messages reach the right people at the right time.

The content included in this toolkit can be used to target both public and professional audiences. It contains background information, key messages, suggested social media copy, social media assets and links to useful information.

#### People at risk of becoming unwell in cold weather

Whilst exposure to cold weather can affect anyone, some people are particularly at risk. These include:

- older people (aged 65 years and over)
- people with long-term health conditions such as cardiovascular or respiratory disease, or a mental health condition
- pregnant women
- young children (particularly those aged 5 and under)
- people with learning disabilities
- people at risk of falls
- people who live alone and may be unable to care for themselves
- people who are housebound or have low mobility
- people living in deprived circumstances

There are many reasons for the increased risk of ill-health in cold weather. These include:

- poor quality housing and particularly cold homes
- higher frequency of circulating infectious diseases, such as flu and norovirus during the winter months
- physical hazards such as snow and ice.

During cold weather, people may also use malfunctioning or inappropriate appliances to heat their homes. This can increase the risk of [carbon monoxide poisoning](#).

When a house is damp as well as cold, mould is more likely to occur. This can increase the risk of illness, especially from asthma.

### **About the Adverse Weather and Health Plan**

The Adverse Weather and Health Plan (AWHP) published in April 2023 delivers UKHSA's commitment under the National Adaptation Programme to develop a single plan, bringing together and improving current guidance on weather and health.

It builds on existing measures taken by government, its agencies, NHS England and local authorities, to protect individuals and communities from the health effects of adverse weather and to build community resilience.

The Plan outlines the important areas where the public sector, independent sector, voluntary sector, health and social care organisations and local communities can work together to maintain and improve integrated arrangements for planning and response to deliver the best outcomes possible during adverse weather.

The Plan is underpinned by:

- an evidence collection, published in parallel, that underlines the activities and scientific evidence that support the Plan
- guidance and support materials
- the Weather-Health alerts (heat and cold), developed in collaboration with the Met Office

### **About the Weather-Health Alerting System**

Underpinning the AWHP is the Weather-Health Alerting System. The Weather-Health Alerting System is made up of the Heat-Health Alerts (HHA) and Cold-Health Alerts (CHA). The core alerting season for CHA runs from 1 November to 31 March.

It is intended to provide early warning to the health and social care sector, the responder community, the voluntary and community sector and government departments when adverse temperatures are likely to impact on the health and wellbeing of the population.

During the winter season, UKHSA and the Met Office will monitor the weather forecasts and where episodes of hot weather are identified using predefined evidence-based considerations, a joint dynamic risk assessment will be carried out and the appropriate alert issued.

Weather-Health Alerts are distributed via email to all those who have registered to receive them once they are issued. If you would like to receive the alerts, [please register and share the link with anyone you feel should be receiving them](#).

A [dedicated web-platform](#) was developed earlier in the year in which the current alert status over the 5-days ahead is publicly available.

It is anticipated that organisations will initiate cascade of alerts within their organisations and to partner organisations as appropriate and as agreed locally.

In line with other weather warning systems in operation within England (and the UK), warnings will be issued when the weather conditions have the potential to impact the health and wellbeing of the population.

The alerts will be given a colour (yellow, amber or red) based on the combination of the impact the weather conditions could have, and the likelihood of those impacts being realised. The platform aims to cover the spectrum of action from different groups. In general terms:

- Green (preparedness): No alert will be issued as the conditions are likely to have minimal impact and health; business as usual and summer/winter planning and preparedness activities.
- Yellow (response): These alerts cover a range of situations. Yellow alerts may be issued during periods of heat/cold which would be unlikely to impact most people but could impact those who are particularly vulnerable.
- Amber (enhanced response): An amber alert indicates that weather impacts are likely to be felt across the whole health service, with potential for the whole population to be at risk. Non-health sectors may also start to observe impacts and a more significant coordinated response may be required.
- Red (emergency response): A red alert indicates significant risk to life for even the healthy population

A [Weather-Health Alert System user guide](#) has been published to help users understand how the information contained within the alerts can be used when coordinating the response to adverse temperatures and provide an overview of what each alert colour means in terms of expected impacts on health.

### **National Weather Warning Service**

Unlike heat, there is currently no extreme cold weather warning issued as part of the National Weather Warning Service (NSWWS) by the Met Office. However, warnings will be issued by the Met Office for a range of high-impact weather events, including rain, fog, wind, thunderstorms, and potentially of most relevance to CHA, snow and ice.

While NSWWS does not consider cold temperature explicitly, these warnings can provide information at a more specific geographical level about snow or ice forecasts and provide a holistic view of the weather picture over an alerting period that the public and emergency planners may find useful.

As with heat, situational awareness will be supported through regular updates between UKHSA and the Met Office throughout the winter season. This will ensure the earliest possible issuing of CHAs and the maximum possible warning time. Specific NSWWS will also serve as contributing factors to the level of alert being issued.

Stakeholders and the public will be urged to look out for both UKHSA Cold Health Alerts and Met Office National Severe Weather Warnings so appropriate action can be taken.

### **Overarching public health messaging on cold weather**

The updated [Keeping warm and well: staying safe](#) in cold weather guidance outlines the key public health messages on cold which can be used as a basis for developing press statements or social media activity when a cold-health alert has been issued.

The main sections cover:

- About cold weather and health
- Keeping your home warm
- Seeking financial support
- Looking after yourself and others
- Preparing your home

There are also a series of [dedicated guidance documents](#) for those people working with groups of people who are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill because of exposure to cold. Key messages for each group can be found in the following sections.

### **Key messages for adult social care managers**

[Guidance for adult social care managers](#) provides advice to managers working in the social care sector on how to reduce the risks of cold weather to the health and wellbeing of those who receive care. Main messages are:

In all settings, you should reduce the risks associated with exposure to cold weather by:

- developing, and where necessary implementing, business continuity plans (BCP) for cold weather, and ensuring all staff know how to take action accordingly
- protecting clients and staff by promoting COVID-19 and flu vaccination for them
- taking simple measures to protect clients and staff from cold, snow and/or ice

If you work in a setting that provides care in clients' own homes, you should also:

- identify who is at higher risk of cold-related illnesses and how to reduce that risk
- have a plan in place for individuals you are responsible for to keep them warm during the winter and ensure staff know how to raise concerns regarding clients they are working with if necessary
- ensure staff are aware of main sources of support for [housing](#), [energy bills](#) and other needs to signpost clients to, including support for those on [low incomes](#)

### **Key messages for healthcare professionals**

[Guidance for healthcare professionals](#) provides advice for caring for people most at risk during cold weather. This guidance is for healthcare professionals working in community, care home or hospital environments, including those working in managerial and in patient-facing roles. Main messages are:

You can reduce the risks associated with exposure to adverse cold weather for those you care for by:

- knowing who is at risk
- being alert to increased cardiovascular, respiratory and other complications from cold exposure
- adapting individual care plans to respond to adverse cold weather
- promoting vaccination for those eligible to reduce risks from COVID-19 and flu
- having action plans in place for your organisation and/or place of work tailored to the local context
- signposting people to sources of support for [housing](#), [energy bills](#) and other needs as appropriate, including specific support for those on [low incomes](#)

### **Key messages for people homeless and sleeping rough**

[Guidance for those with responsibility for those currently experiencing homeless or sleeping rough](#) during cold weather. This includes:

- local authority teams for emergency preparedness, public health and rough sleeping
- non-governmental organisations working with people who sleep rough such as those providing temporary accommodation or street-based support.

Main messages are:

When supporting people sleeping rough before and during cold weather, consider:

- people sleeping rough are at high risk of poor health outcomes or even death during cold weather episodes
- before winter begins, clear plans should be in place to support those who are sleeping rough, tailored to the local context
- services should sign up to, and be familiar with, the new ([Cold-Health Alert \(CHA\)](#)) system established in partnership with the Met Office, and local services should consider how they would trigger local Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) in relation to the new CHA system
- identify who and where your most vulnerable individuals are, how accommodation will be provided for them when SWEP are triggered, and other ways in which you can help them through periods of cold weather
- identify factors that may affect your team's ability to operate in cold weather and adapt care strategy and plans accordingly (such as transport disruption, and increased risk of staff illness affecting capacity)
- promote key winter preventive measures such as COVID-19 and flu vaccination for people sleeping rough, and for eligible staff members, to reduce risks of infection
- develop best practice by collaborating with local authorities, other relevant partners, and people sleeping rough, to provide mutual support and share learning

### Key messages for teachers and other educational professionals

[Guidance for those who work in or manage schools or early years settings](#) and offers advice on looking after children attending these settings during cold weather. It applies to:

- early years and childcare
- wraparound childcare and out of school settings
- children's social care
- schools
- alternative provision settings
- special educational needs and disability (SEND) and specialist settings

The main sections in the guidance include health risks to children and young people; actions to take before and during adverse weather (covering advice on buildings and premises; supporting children; and supporting staff); and further resources and information.

### Useful quotes for spells of cold weather

#### Quote #1

Dr Agostinho Sousa, Head of Extreme Events and Health Protection at UKHSA, said:

*“As cold weather persists throughout the rest of the week, it is important to check in on the wellbeing of those most vulnerable.”*

*“Cold weather can have a serious impact on health, including for older people, young children and those with certain long-term health conditions, as it increases the risks of heart attacks, strokes, and chest infections.”*

*“It is important to try and heat your home to at least 18°C if you can, and to take other measures to protect yourself such as wearing lots of layers.”*

#### Quote #2

Dr Agostinho Sousa, Head of Extreme Events and Health Protection at UKHSA, said:

*“During periods like this, it is important to check in on family, friends and relatives who may be more vulnerable to the cold weather, as it can have a serious impact on health.*

*“Keep in touch with others and ask if they need any practical help such as stocking up on food and medicine. If you’re worried about someone else’s health, contact your local pharmacist, your GP or NHS 111 for advice and support”.*

## **Example UKHSA news stories**

The UKHSA and the Met Office have issued an amber cold-health alert (CHA) in 8 regions of England.

The regions included in the amber alert are:

- London
- South East
- South West
- North West
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- Yorkshire and the Humber

The alert is currently in place from 9AM on Tuesday 5 December to 11pm on Sunday 10 December. The Met Office has forecast temperatures as low as -4 °C. Under the [new CHA system](#) introduced by UKHSA and the Met Office, an amber alert means that weather impacts are likely to be felt across the whole health service, with potential for the whole population to be at risk and where other sectors may also start to observe impacts, indicating a coordinated response is required. There is particular risk to those aged 65+ and some other vulnerable groups, such as those sleeping rough and those with long-term health conditions.

Here are the ways in which you can keep yourself and others safe during periods of cold weather:

- check on family, friends and neighbours who may be at higher risk of becoming unwell, and if you are at higher risk, ask them to do the same for you
- Check the weather forecast and the news
- Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine
- Take simple measures to reduce draughts at home
- Heat rooms you spend most time in, to 18°C if you can
- Keep bedroom windows closed
- Wear multiple layers of thinner clothing
- If you’re eligible, get vaccinated against flu and COVID-19
- Get help if needed. Call NHS 111 or in an emergency 999

## **Further information**

- At the start of November, our new CHA system in partnership with the Met Office went live. Stay across the [alerts that have been issued in your region](#).
- As part of the launch of the [Adverse Weather and Health Plan](#), UKHSA has updated its [guidance on staying safe in cold weather](#).
- To check the latest weather forecast updates visit the [Met Office website](#) or [app](#).
- UKHSA has supplemented the [Adverse Weather and Health Plan](#) with [top tips for keeping warm](#) and [Keeping warm and well](#) guidance.
- For people struggling to afford heating bills, [Simple Energy Advice](#) provides free advice on energy efficiency and national grants that are available to help keep you warm this winter.
- If people can't heat all the rooms they use, it's important to heat the rooms they spend most time in (e.g. the living room during the day and the bedroom just before going to sleep). They should aim to heat these rooms to at least 18 degrees if they can. Wearing a few thin layers is better at trapping heat than wearing one thick layer.

## Broadcast interview top lines

### Prepare your home

Before winter begins, check for available financial support, implement energy-saving practices to reduce heating costs, and ensure your appliances are both safe and in good working condition.

### Plan Ahead

Ahead of a cold spell, check the weather forecast and the news to stay informed, ensure you have enough food and medicine, and take simple measures to reduce draughts at home for your comfort and well-being.

### Keep yourself warm

To stay warm during the colder months, try heating rooms where you spend a lot of time, like the living room or bedroom, to at least 18°C if you can. Additionally, reduce draughts by using affordable draft excluders around doors, keep bedroom windows closed at night, and layer thinner clothing for better insulation, which can often be more effective than a single thick layer.

### Look after the most vulnerable

Encourage individuals at higher risk, such as those with limited mobility, individuals aged 65 and older, or those with health conditions, to maintain their home temperature at a minimum of 18°C. If they need to go outdoors, communicate the importance of wearing shoes that provide good grip.

### Look after yourself

Take proactive steps to protect yourself and others by getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 if eligible, and seeking assistance, when necessary, which can be done by calling NHS 111 or 999 in emergencies.

## Social media/online content

Social media assets will be available to download on the Campaign Resource Centre (CRC) and are now available to download on [GoogleDrive](#) alongside suggested copy and alt text.

Social media assets and suggested copy can also be found below:

Suggested social media copy	Image
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*Please note that these assets should only be used when a yellow alert under the Cold Health Alert system has been issued.*

“Together with the @metoffice, UKHSA have issued a yellow cold-health alert for (parts) of England”

“The alert covers X regions in England. Read more: XXXXX ”

*For use regionally, the same asset to be used but region should be specified in post copy.*

**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

# Cold weather is forecast

**Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine** and take measures to **reduce draughts** in your home.

**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

# Cold weather is forecast

**Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine** and take measures to **reduce draughts** in your home.

**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

# Cold weather is forecast

**Don't get stranded in cold weather**

**Look out** for UKHSA Weather Health Alerts and Met Office National Severe Weather Warnings **so you can take informed action in time.**





**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

# Cold weather is forecast

**Don't get stranded in cold weather**

Look out for UKHSA Weather Health Alerts and Met Office National Severe Weather Warnings **so you can take informed action in time.**

*Please note that these assets must only be used when amber or red Cold Health Alerts are issued, or when Met Office issues a warning of snow or ice.*

“Very cold weather is forecast”

“Don't get stranded in cold weather. Look out for UKHSA Weather Health Alerts and Met Office National Severe Weather Warnings so you can take informed action in time”

AND/OR

“Very cold weather is forecast”

“Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine and take measures to reduce draughts in your home”

AND/OR

“Together with the @metoffice, UKHSA have issued a amber/red cold-health alert for (parts) of England”

“The alert covers X regions in England. Read more: XXXXX”

*For use regionally, the same asset to be used but region should be specified in post copy.*

**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

# Very cold weather is forecast

**Don't get stranded in cold weather**

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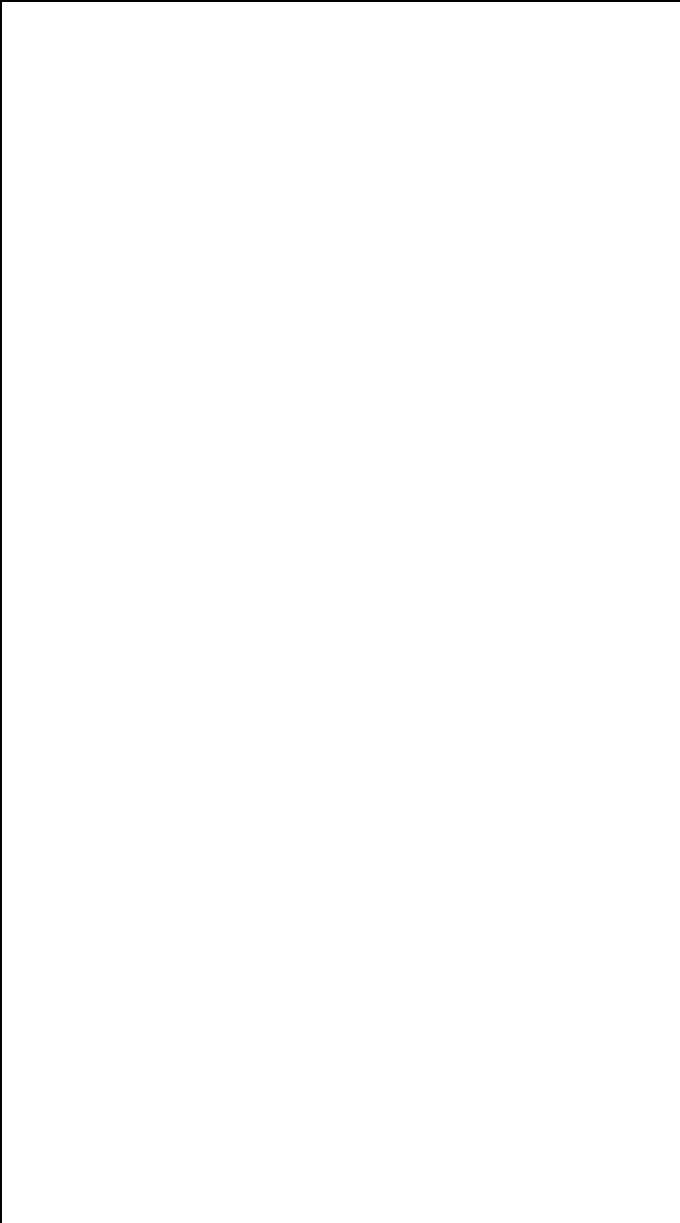
**COLD WEATHER**

UK Health Security Agency

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UK Health Security Agency

COLD WEATHER

## Very cold weather is forecast



**Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine** and take measures to **reduce draughts in your home.**

UK Health Security Agency

COLD WEATHER

## Very cold weather is forecast



**Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine** and take measures to **reduce draughts in your home.**

“Together with @metoffice, UKHSA have issued a yellow/amber/red cold-health alert for (parts) of England”

“The alert covers X regions in England. Read more: XXXX”

*For regional colleagues, same asset to be used but their region is specified in post copy*

UK Health Security Agency

COLD WEATHER

## Cold weather is forecast

### Things we can all do to stay warm

-  **Heat rooms to 18 degrees** if you can
-  **Keep bedroom windows closed**
-  **Wear plenty of layers**

Caring for a vulnerable or older person this winter? Here are some tips to help them stay well through the colder months.

For more information go to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather/top-tips-for-keeping-warm-and-well-this-winter>

GIFs:



“In this cold weather, don’t forget to look out for anyone close to you who might struggle with the drop in temperature”

“Check our list of people at higher risk

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather/top-tips-for-keeping-warm-and-well-this-winter>”



### Look out for others as temperature drops

**Cold weather can have serious consequences for health.** Older people, young children and those with certain long-term health conditions may be particularly at risk.



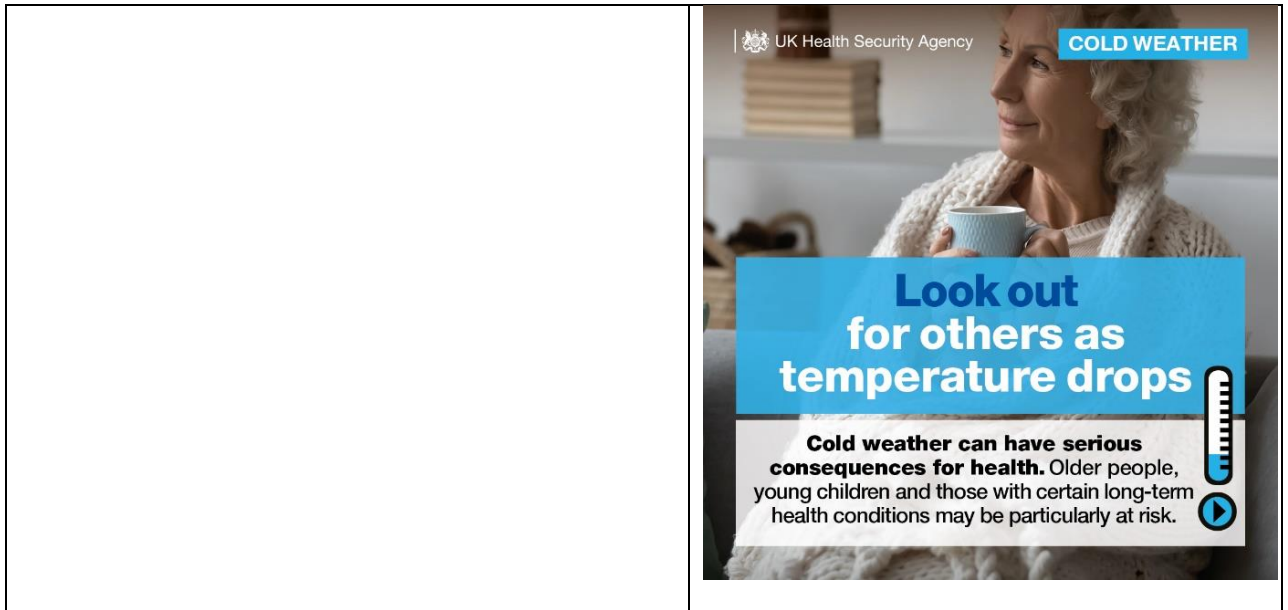
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### Look out for others as temperature drops

**Cold weather can have serious consequences for health.** Older people, young children and those with certain long-term health conditions may be particularly at risk.



### Suggested hashtags

#ColdWeather #WeatherReady #WeatherAware

### Q&A

**The recommendation from UKHSA is to heat your home to 18°C. What is the reasoning behind this and do people need to heat their home to this temperature?**

Public Health England reviewed the evidence that assessed the health impacts of specific temperatures. In general, in the adult population, there is an association between raised blood pressure and exposure to indoor temperatures below 18°C. This risk is particularly heightened in those over the age of 65, children under the age of 5 and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Older people were found to be more vulnerable to cold weather because of an increased likelihood of pre-existing chronic illness and partly because of a reduction in body fat, while children under the age of five are vulnerable due to immature thermoregulation and a high dependency level. In addition, some illnesses and conditions can reduce a person's ability to self-care. Based on the evidence, Public Health England recommended heating your home/room to 18°C in winter.

**Do other organisations share this recommendation?**

In their housing and health guidelines, the World Health Organisation (WHO) note that there is a high certainty that taking measures to warm cold houses will have significant benefits, and while current evidence is insufficient to establish the precise temperature below which adverse health effects are likely to occur, a minimum of 18°C is widely accepted.

In their 'We're here to help you stay well this winter' guidance, the NHS state 'Heat your home to a temperature that's comfortable for you. If you can, this should be at least 18°C in the rooms that you regularly use, such as your living room and bedroom. This is particularly important if you have a pre-existing medical condition. You should also keep your bedroom windows closed at night.'

**What support is available to people in order to cope with this rising costs?**

You should make sure you are receiving all the help that you are entitled to. There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to help you [make your home more energy efficient](#), [improve your heating](#) or help manage energy bills.

There are also support measures in place to help with the cost of living, [especially for those on low incomes](#). For example, if you claim certain benefits or tax credits, you may be eligible for an extra payment from the government to help with the cost of living. The government has published [energy saving tips](#) to help save money on bills.

You can visit [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating) or call 0800 444202 for more information on the discounts you are entitled to ahead of the winter months.

### **What other measures can people take to stay warm this winter?**

There are a number of ways to look after yourself in the winter. You can do this by:

- Making sure you have sufficient food and medicine in case you are unable to go out when it's cold and icy
- Take simple measures to reduce draughts in your home. You can fit draft excluders around doors cheaply. Depending on what you can afford, options could include insulation of water pipers to prevent them from freezing; loft insulation; internal, cavity and external wall insulation; and double (or triple) window glazing.
- Keep your windows closed at night
- Wear several layers of thinner clothing; this can keep you warmer than one thicker layer
- Exercising – try not to sit still for more than an hour or so, but if you find it difficult to move about, stretching your arms and legs can also keep you warm. If you have visitors, it can help stop the spread of germs to [ventilate the room](#) for a few minutes before and after they arrive; you might be more comfortable leaving the window open during their visit, if it's not too cold
- Wearing good-fitting slippers with a good grip indoors and shoes with a good grip outside to prevent slips, trips and falls
- Eat well and stay hydrated. It can sometimes be difficult to keep up the motivation to prepare meals in winter, but our diet, including how much we eat, is an important part of staying healthy and well.
- Make sure your household appliances are safe and working well. Regular servicing of your appliances can keep them working efficiently and for longer, saving you money.

### **If people have visitors this year, should they prioritise staying warm or ventilating their house to stop the spread of diseases?**

Letting fresh air into indoor spaces can help reduce virus particles and prevent the spread of respiratory infections such as COVID and flu. If you have visitors, it can be helpful to ventilate the room for a few minutes before and after they arrive. This is most important when someone in the household has a respiratory infection.

### **Links and resources**

#### **Adverse Weather and Health Plan**

The [Adverse Weather and Health Plan webpage](#) contains:

- Adverse Weather and Health Plan
- Adverse Weather and Health Plan: supporting evidence

- [Weather Health Alerting System: user guide](#) and [sign up](#)

## **Cold weather and health: guidance and advice**

The [Cold weather and health: guidance and advice](#) page contains:

### **Guidance**

**Cold weather and health: supporting vulnerable people:** This information aims to assist professionals in protecting vulnerable people from the health impacts of cold weather in England.

- [Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: for adult social care managers](#)
- [Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: healthcare professionals](#)
- [Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: healthcare professionals](#)
- [Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: healthcare professionals](#)

### **Cold weather resources**

**Keeping warm and well: staying safe in cold weather:** Advice on staying well in cold weather, covering issues such as financial help, healthy lifestyle, flu vaccinations and heating.

- [Keeping warm and well: staying safe in cold weather](#) (HTML)
- [Top tips for keeping warm and well this winter \(print version\)](#)
- [Keeping warm and well: staying safe in cold weather \(poster\)](#)

### **Cold weather action cards:**

**Cold weather and health: action cards.** CHA action cards summarise suggested actions to be taken by different professional bodies and organisations in the event of cold weather.

- [Cold-Health Alert action card for commissioners](#)
- [Cold-Health Alert action card for health and social care providers](#)
- [Cold-Health Alert action card for the voluntary and community sector](#)

For downloadable summary posters, go to:

- [Cold-Health Alert summary action card for commissioners](#)
- [Cold-Health Alert summary action card for voluntary and community sector](#)

### **Other resources:**

- [UKHSA blog: How Weather-Health Alerts differ from the National Severe Weather Warning Service](#)
- Helping People Living in Cold Homes: an [e-module on cold homes and health for frontline practitioners](#)
- [Find out which local services disrupted are by severe weather by postcode](#)
- [NHS England: Seasonal vaccinations and winter health](#)
- [Met Office: Find a forecast](#)

- [Met Office National Severe Weather Warning Service](#)
- [Met Office Severe Weather](#)
- [Met Office Weather Ready](#)

**Thank you**

For further information please contact: [externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk](mailto:externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk)

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