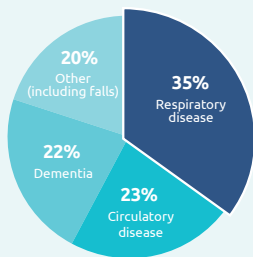


Improving winter health and well-being and reducing winter pressures in Wales

Wales has higher levels of poor health and death during the winter months compared to the rest of the year. Understanding the health impacts of winter weather and actions required to mitigate poor health during this period can help policy makers, health and care services, third sector organisations and the public plan for winter, improving the health of current and future populations.

Health impacts of winter weather

3,400 excess winter deaths¹ in Wales during 2017/18



Respiratory disease² is a leading cause of excess winter death



30% of excess winter deaths are due to cold homes

Over **75%** of excess winter deaths are in those aged 75+ years



A 1°C temperature decrease during winter months is associated with a:



5%↑ in respiratory illness, including influenza

3%↑ in death from respiratory disease



2%↑ in death from cardiovascular disease in the over 65s

Prolonged³ cold weather can **x2** the risk of death from cardiovascular disease

Influenza transmissions

1 in 3 occur in schools and workplaces



40% of **hypothermia** deaths are linked to alcohol use and **22%** are linked to psychoactive drug use

Impact on Welsh services



Peaks in **emergency hospital admissions** are seen in the winter (by **3-5%** above average)



Emergency hospital admissions increase in younger people (**0-17 years**) and older people (**65+ years**) during winter

Groups most affected by cold weather

- Older people
- People with chronic diseases
- Pregnant women
- People living in deprived areas
- People living in cold homes
- People living in fuel poverty
- Homeless individuals
- People with unhealthy behaviours:
 - Smoking
 - Excess alcohol
 - Sedentary behaviour



¹Excess winter deaths are defined as the number of deaths that occur in the winter period compared with the average number of deaths occurring in the preceding August to November and the following April to July.

²Respiratory diseases are defined as ICD 10 codes J00 to J99. This includes respiratory infections, respiratory and lung diseases, and influenza and pneumonia.

³At least three consecutive days.

Cold homes are a risk factor for poor health



Indoor temperatures below **18°C** can harm health at any age

Among children, living in a cold home can:



x2 the risk of breathing problems



Contribute to **anxiety** and **depression**

Examples of what is happening in Wales to improve winter health



Influenza vaccination

868,668 people in Wales were vaccinated in 2018/19



Nest (warm homes programme)

Energy efficiency measures for low income households



Choose Well (national community pharmacy campaign)

Health advice & signposting for people with long term conditions



Ageing Well in Wales

Steady On, Stay Safe (falls prevention programme)

Risk assessment for falls in the home and exercises to improve strength & balance



Framework for action⁴



Strengthen prevention actions

- **Optimise public health interventions** e.g. supporting healthy behaviours
- **Prevent the spread of respiratory viral infections** e.g. maximising influenza vaccination uptake and providing handwashing advice
- **Prevent falls** e.g. through exercise programmes and home safety assessments
- **Help vulnerable individuals keep warm** e.g. through services for the homeless
- **Support households living in fuel poverty** e.g. by providing financial support
- **Increase warmth and energy efficiency of homes** e.g. through home improvements



Health and care service interventions

- **Support self management of people with long term illnesses** e.g. through help navigating through health and care services, and healthy behaviours interventions
- **Ensure support and continuity of care following hospital discharge**
- **Broaden winter planning to year round 'continuous preventative planning'** that is responsive to seasonal needs and extreme weather events
- **Ensure interventions are commissioned/delivered on an ongoing basis** to reduce demand on services
- **Address service barriers to managing winter pressures** e.g. by improving communication, supporting staff well-being and increasing staff capacity
- **Implement the Emergency Care Dataset**



Community approaches

- **Strengthen resilience within local communities** e.g. by increasing social networks
- **Optimise local services and networks for vulnerable groups**
- **Provide community based initiatives on an ongoing basis** to reduce demand on hospitals e.g. providing ambulatory care



Research priorities

- **Understand the links between winter and well-being** (including mental well-being)
- **Explore approaches/effectiveness for building community health, well-being and resilience**
- **Evaluate the impact of winter health campaigns**
- **Identify the impact of current approaches** and opportunities for scaling up best practice

⁴For more details about the framework please see the full report: Improving winter health and well-being and reducing winter pressures in Wales. A preventative approach.