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Cold weather advice for the public

Cold weather can pose serious health risks including hypothermia (where body temperature falls below normal and the body fails to cope), falls and injuries, heart attacks, strokes, respiratory diseases and flu. Indirect effects of cold include mental health illnesses such as depression, and carbon monoxide poisoning from poorly maintained or poorly ventilated boilers, cooking and heating appliances.

Those most at risk of suffering impacts from cold weather include older people, very young children and people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Taking action based on the following information may help you to reduce these health risks:

Before any cold weather sets in, make sure you:

- ✓ **Get your flu jab** if you are aged 65 or over, pregnant, have certain medical conditions, live in a residential or nursing home, or are the main carer for an older or disabled person. Ask your health or social care provider about staying healthy in winter and make sure you have sufficient medication if winter weather is forecast.
- ✓ **Have your heating and cooking appliances checked?** Carbon monoxide is a killer. Make sure that flues and chimneys are swept and checked for blockages and ventilation points are not blocked. If you are not connected to gas or electricity mains and use heating oil, LPG or wood products as the main heating source, make sure that you have a sufficient supply to avoid running out in winter. You should also fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm which is EN 50291-compliant, but fitting an alarm should not replace regular maintenance of appliances.
- ✓ **Get financial support.** There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. It's worthwhile claiming all the benefits you are entitled to and to access these before any colder weather sets in.

When cold weather is expected:

- ✓ **Stay informed.** Keep up to date with forecast weather conditions on the television, radio and internet and in newspapers. Check the latest weather reports [metoffice.gov.uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk)
- ✓ **Avoid catching colds or flu.** Always cover your nose or mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and encourage visitors and relatives to do the same. Throw away used tissues as soon as possible. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water. Stock up on over the counter cough and cold remedies and paper tissues.
- ✓ **Keep warm** to minimise the risk of hypothermia (a condition where the body becomes dangerously cold). Maintain your heating to the right temperature (between 18°C/65°F (bedroom) and 21°C/70°F (dayroom)), so you can keep warm and keep your bills as low as possible. Use room thermostats or other heating controls if you have them. Have a room thermometer so you can monitor the temperature indoors. To help keep warm:
 - wear several thin layers of clothes to trap body heat rather than one thick layer;
 - wear clothes made from cotton, wool or fleecy materials to maintain body heat;
 - keep warm in bed;
 - remember to wear a hat if you go outdoors- a lot of body heat is lost from the head;
 - eat well and have at least one hot meal each day;
 - have hot drinks throughout the day;
 - have adequate heating at home and take measures to reduce draughts and heat loss.
- ✓ **Look after yourself and check on older neighbours** or relatives to make sure they are safe, warm and well. Layer your clothing and wear shoes with a good grip if you need to go outside.



- ✓ **Food is a vital source of energy**, which helps to keep your body warm. Try to make sure that you have hot meals and drinks regularly throughout the day and keep active in the home if you can. Stock up on tinned and frozen foods so you don't have to go out much when it is icy outside.
- ✓ **Make your home safe and warm.** Draught-proof around windows and doors – seek energy advice on this. Avoid blocking ventilation points in the home. Check your heating is working properly and make sure you have access to sufficient fuel supplies, especially if you rely on oil, LPG or wood deliveries.
- ✓ **If you are without electricity**, make sure you have: a supply of torches and/or camping lanterns for emergency lighting, a camping gas cooker or other means of cooking if you rely entirely on electricity, a battery-powered radio (make sure you have replacement batteries) in order to receive regular local radio information bulletins. If your electricity supply fails turn off all major appliances, particularly electric fires and cookers, until power is restored. Never open deep freezers until electricity is fully restored, cover with newspaper and blankets for extra insulation. If food thaws out do not refreeze, use it straight away or consult Local Council Environmental Health Services for general advice.
- ✓ **In case water supplies fail**, store a few filled containers with fresh water for drinking purposes, especially for young children and for infant feeds.
- ✓ **Protect your property.** When severe weather is forecast stow away garden furniture and remove loose articles from outside the house; these might cause damage if blown around. If severe weather strikes, stay indoors, close windows and curtains to protect against breaking glass. Make sure you have adequate home insurance to cover your property.
- ✓ **Stay safe outdoors.** If you have to go out, make sure you dress warmly and wear non-slip shoes. Also, tell someone where you are going and let them know when you get back. If you have a mobile phone, keep it charged and with you at all times. If you are planning a long trip, take any medication you need to take regularly and a copy of your repeat prescription.
- ✓ **Make sure you have a list of emergency numbers** in case you need to call for help.
- ✓ **Travel in severe cold weather**
Do not travel unless your journey is absolutely necessary. Allow extra time for your journey and ensure your vehicle is in good working order. If you must drive, be prepared for delays. The following advice is to help you avoid hypothermia in case you become stuck in the cold:
Carry an emergency kit. A basic kit should include:
 - Mobile phone
 - Map
 - Jump leads
 - Torch
 - Warning triangle
 - Ice scraper
 - De icer
 - First Aid kit
 - Warm clothes and a blanket**If you are planning a long trip or if severe weather is expected you should add:**
 - Any medication you need to take regularly and a copy of your repeat prescription
 - Food and a thermos with a hot drink
 - A shovel (if there is snow expected)
 - A pair of boots
 - A sleeping bag

Further information is available from

Public Health Wales Extreme Weather Pages

publichealthwales.org/extreme-weather