



Your Winter Well Guide

It may seem obvious that you should want to keep warm in the winter but many people don't realise the serious threat to health posed by the cold weather.



Northamptonshire

In the winter, colds and flu are circulating and older people can be particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold weather. Certain health conditions are more obvious when a cold spell takes hold – more people experience chest problems, such as infections and breathing problems – but it also means that there are likely to be more people hurting themselves through trips and falls due to icy paths, for example.

Here are some simple tips and suggestions to help you and your loved ones stay healthy this winter. We have also included information on the local NHS health services which are there to help you.



Looking out for neighbours

If you have an older person as a neighbour or a relative, please look out for them in the winter months and follow the advice in this booklet.

If you are worried about a relative or an elderly neighbour, contact your local council. You can also call the free Age UK advice line on 0800 169 6565.

Seasonal Flu

Seasonal flu is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus and cannot be treated with antibiotics. Every year there are approximately 8,000 seasonal flu related deaths in the winter months in England and Wales.

Have a free flu jab

Everyone who is at risk of seasonal flu is encouraged to protect themselves by getting their free flu jab at their GP practice.

The 'at risk' group includes.

- Everyone aged 65 and over
- Under 65s with long-term conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, serious kidney and liver disease
- Pregnant women
- Carers of people at risk

Around 15 million people in the UK have the jab, which must be given annually, as it is altered each year to match the seasonal flu strains in circulation.

Flu symptoms hit you suddenly and severely. They usually include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, and you

can also get a cough and sore throat at the same time. It is very different from a common cold.

Remember – the flu jab will also help protect the people around you – family, friends and loved ones, by reducing the spread of flu in the community.

If you or any member of your family is concerned about flu and would like to take up the offer of a free flu jab, then please contact your GP practice.

When you see your GP, also ask whether you need the ‘pneumo jab’ to protect against serious forms of pneumococcal infection. It’s available to everyone aged 65 or over and for younger people with certain serious medical conditions.



Coping with flu

If you have the symptoms of a cold or flu

Try to rest, eat well, and drink plenty of fluids.

Going to your local pharmacy could save you time and avoid a trip to your doctor. You can get professional advice and treatments without an appointment. There are many medicines that you can buy over-the-counter which will ease your symptoms.

- Painkillers, such as paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin, can bring down your temperature and help with aches and pains if you have a cold. But remember that aspirin shouldn't be given to children under 16 years of age
- If you have a stuffy nose, decongestants can help. They reduce the swelling inside your nose so you can breathe more easily. You could also inhale steam with a decongestant in it which will help clear a blocked nose

Contact your GP if:

- you already have a heart or chest complaint, diabetes, or a serious medical condition
- the symptoms persist or get worse
- you have chest pains or become short of breath


Stop infections spreading

Everyone has a part to play in helping to prevent the spread of common winter infections including diarrhoea and vomiting (sometimes known as Norovirus) and respiratory viruses such as flu.

Hand washing with soap and warm water is the most important thing you can do to help reduce the spread of infections.

Good respiratory hygiene measures include using disposable paper tissues when sneezing, coughing and blowing your nose followed by disposing of any tissues and then washing your hands.


These simple measures, plus not visiting a patient in hospital if you are unwell yourself, can make a big difference and will help protect you, your family and those around you.



If you are poorly with diarrhoea and vomiting, then there are a few simple actions you can take to help yourself feel better and protect those around you.

- Firstly, remember to drink plenty of water as you may become dehydrated when you are ill
- Stay away from work or school, etc.
- Do not go to A&E, Minor Injuries Units or your GP practice unless you require urgent medical attention for another condition
- Wash your hands regularly
- Don't share washing items or towels
- Keep soiled washing separate from other items. They should be laundered on as hot a wash as possible
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowl, flush handles and taps/wash basins twice a day with detergent and hot water

If the symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting last longer than four days, then seek telephone advice from NHS Direct (0845 46 47) or contact your GP practice.



Choose well

If you are feeling under the weather this winter, then you may need some medical advice, but you may not need to go to your GP or other healthcare setting. There are lots of NHS services that may be able to treat you quicker and provide you with the help you need.

Self care

This is the best choice to treat very minor illnesses, ailments and injuries. A range of common illnesses and complaints can be treated with a well stocked medicine cabinet and plenty of rest.

NHS Direct

NHS Direct provides expert health advice and information via a confidential telephone service, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can call 0845 46 47 or go to www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Pharmacy

Your local pharmacist can provide confidential, expert advice and treatment for a range of common illnesses and complaints, without you having to go to your GP or other healthcare setting.

Repeat prescriptions

One of the most important things you can do if you are on regular medication is to get your repeat prescription organised in advance, especially over the Christmas and New Year period when your GP practice may be closed.

This will make it easier for you as you will not have to worry about trying to get your medicines over the holiday period, so contact your GP surgery in good time to make sure you're prepared.

GP services

Family doctors provide a wide range of health services including general medical advice and treatment, prescriptions, referral to a specialist or hospital, immunisation and tests. Your GP can help if you have an illness or injury that won't go away. Simply make an appointment with your practice.

For details of local practices and advice on how to register with a GP go to NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk or contact the NHS Northamptonshire Advice and Information Service on 0800 5870 879.

GP out of hours service

If you live in Northamptonshire and urgently need a doctor out of normal hours, ring 03336 664 664. The Out of Hours service is available between 6.30pm and 8am, and at weekends and bank holidays (24 hours).

Patients living in in Brackley and surrounding villages can also use Oxford Urgent Care Service on 0845 345 8995 – same hours as above.

Patients in the Oundle and Wansford area can also use the Peterborough-based Out of Hours GP service on 01733 293838 – same hours as above.

Walk-in centres

Lakeside Plus 8-8 Centre
Willowbrook Health Complex, Cottingham Road,
Corby NN17 2UW.

The centre offers a range of services including a nurse-led minor illness service and sexual health service including emergency contraception. Patients do not have to be registered at the centre, and can walk in or book an appointment on 01536 204154. The centre is open from 8am-8pm, every day of the year.

Minor injury units

Minor injury units are another way you can access fast, convenient NHS treatment for minor injuries like sprains, strains, minor burns and wounds, whilst also reducing pressure on A&E departments, enabling staff there to deal with more serious medical problems. It also means that you will be seen and treated quickly.

Corby Minor Injuries Unit, Willowbrook Health Complex,
Cottingham Road, Corby NN17 2UW. Tel: 01536 400600
Open: 8am - 6pm Monday to Friday
9am - 6pm, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays

MlaMI – Minor Illness and Minor Injury Unit
Highfield Clinical Care Centre, Cliftonville Road, Northampton.
NN1 5BD. Tel: 01604 745050
Open 8am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays)

MlaMI offers the same services as the Corby Minor Injuries Unit, plus minor illnesses like colds and flu, stomach upsets and ear infections as well as emergency hormonal contraception.

Accident and Emergency

You should only go to A&E or call 999 in a critical or life-threatening situation. This can include:

- unconsciousness
- a suspected stroke
- heavy blood loss
- a deep wound such as a stab wound
- a suspected heart attack
- difficulty in breathing
- severe burns

The Emergency Ambulance Service is very busy and 999 should only be used in very serious or life-threatening situations. Choosing well ensures that the emergency service is available for those who really need it.

Living well

The best way to get through winter is to keep warm and to follow as healthy a lifestyle as possible.

What you eat and drink, what you wear and the exercise you take can make a big difference.

Eat well

A balanced diet of regular meals will help keep you warm and healthy in the winter.

Try to:

- have plenty of hot food and drinks
- plan your meals and keep your diet as varied as possible
- aim to include five portions of fruit and vegetables daily – this includes tinned and frozen fruit and vegetables
- keep a flask with a hot drink in it by your bed in case you feel cold at night

Wear it well

Wearing the right kind of clothes can help keep you much warmer. You can help keep warm by:

- wearing plenty of thin layers, rather than one thick one
- putting on a coat, hat, scarf and gloves when you go outside
- wearing flat, dry, warm, non-slip shoes or boots to keep your feet warm and to stop you slipping or falling when you go outside

- wearing clothes made of wool, cotton or fleecy synthetic fibres
- wearing bed socks, thermal underwear and a nightcap when you go to bed

Top tip: Wear slippers in the house to help avoid trips and falls.

Move well

Staying active is good for your health – whatever the time of year. Moderate exercise like walking can be very beneficial.

If you have an exercise routine, try to keep it up in winter as it will help keep you warm. Don't take risks in wet or icy weather, though. And, if you are outside in the cold for whatever reason, try to keep moving rather than standing or sitting. At home, try not to stay sitting still for long periods.

If you space chores out through the day, you can alternate between rest and activity.

Keeping warm at home

With some planning now, you can make a big difference to how warm your house is in the winter.

Preparation – get your home ready for winter

If your home is poorly insulated, it'll be cold in winter and will cost more to heat. To make your home warmer in winter you can:

- fit draught-proofing – to help seal gaps around windows and doors
- insulate your property – to reduce heat loss
- lag your hot water cylinder and pipes, including those in your loft
- have your heating system serviced annually. Some gas or electricity suppliers offer free safety checks

Heating your home

Here's some advice on keeping your home warm.

In the day

- heat your main living room to around 18-21°C (64-70°F) and the rest of the house to at least 16°C (61°F)
- heat all the rooms you use in the day
- make sure you keep your living room warm throughout the day and heat your bedroom before going to bed
- set the timer on your heating to come on before you get up and switch off when you go to bed
- In very cold weather, set the heating to come on earlier, rather than turn the thermostat up. This means you won't be cold while you wait for your home to heat up

At night

- try to keep the temperature above 18°C (65°F) in your bedroom overnight
- open the window or door a little at night for ventilation if you use a fire or heater in your bedroom during winter
- never use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket, even if the blanket is switched off
- unplug blankets before you go to bed, unless they have a thermostat control for safe all-night use
- get your electric blanket tested every three years for safety – Age UK or your local fire and rescue service may be able to do this for you

To be put in touch with an Age UK group near you, call Age UK's freephone advice line on 0800 169 6565.

Protecting against carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide kills more than 50 people each year in England and Wales – mainly because of incorrectly installed, poorly maintained or poorly ventilated cooking and heating equipment.

Because you can't see or smell carbon monoxide, the best way to protect yourself is to have all gas and fossil fuel appliances and flues serviced regularly by trained, reputable, engineers. Go to **www.gassaferegister.co.uk** or call 0800 408 5500 to find a Gas Safe registered engineer.

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can be like food poisoning, viral infections or flu. They include headaches, tiredness, difficulty in thinking clearly and feeling sick. If you suffer from these symptoms:

- see your doctor at once and
- call an engineer to check all your cooking and heating appliances



