

Get ready for Winter



Winter can bring lovely frosty days and fun in the snow, but cold weather can have a negative effect on health with an increase in rates of illness and avoidable deaths. Negative health effects start at the relatively moderate outdoor mean temperatures of between 4 to 8°C whilst those who are vulnerable are at greater risk, cold weather can affect even healthy people but there is lots of advice to help keep you well and reduce illness, trips, and falls.



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

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- older people (aged 65 years and over)
- anyone with long-term health conditions such as cardiovascular or respiratory disease, or a mental health condition
- pregnant women
- 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 even if temporarily e.g. after an operation or accident.
- people living in deprived circumstances.
- young children (particularly those aged 5 and under)
- people with learning disabilities



Make sure you are aware of the health dangers of cold weather and know how to recognise signs and symptoms in yourself and others.

<p>Although the risk of death increases as temperatures fall, evidence shows that most of the health burden due to cold weather occurs at outdoor temperatures considered relatively mild 4-8°C. It doesn't need to be freezing or below to negatively affect your health.</p>	
Temperature	<u>Health impacts</u>
	The human body responds in different ways to exposure to cold weather, even at temperatures which might be considered relatively mild.
18°C	Minimal risks to health for a sedentary person wearing suitable clothing
Under 18°C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases <u>blood pressure</u> and risk of clotting, <u>potentially leading to heart attack and stroke even in healthy people</u> who are sedentary and/or wearing minimal clothes.
Under 16°C 	<p><u>Increase in respiratory diseases</u> e.g. bronchitis and pneumonia due to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> suppression of the immune system increased airways constriction and mucus production in the lungs, diminished capacity of lungs to fight off infection.
4-8°C	Increased risk of death at population level- take care
At or below 5°C	High risk of hypothermia

UK Health Security Agency COLD WEATHER

The direct and indirect effects of cold weather

Exposure to cold weather can affect your health in different ways, even at temperatures as mild as 4 to 8 °C

Direct effects

- heart attack
- stroke
- increased risk of respiratory disease

weakened lung function causing an increased risk of influenza

- falls and injuries
- hypothermia

Indirect effects

- disruption to healthcare services caused by snow and ice
- carbon monoxide poisoning
- poorer mental health and reduced educational and employment attainment have been linked to cold homes and fuel poverty



Get Winter ready

Keep an eye on the weather forecast, sign up for [weather alerts](#) so you can take account of the weather when planning activities for the following days and to make sure you've got enough food in to save trips out in the cold. Remember to order repeat prescription medications in plenty of time.

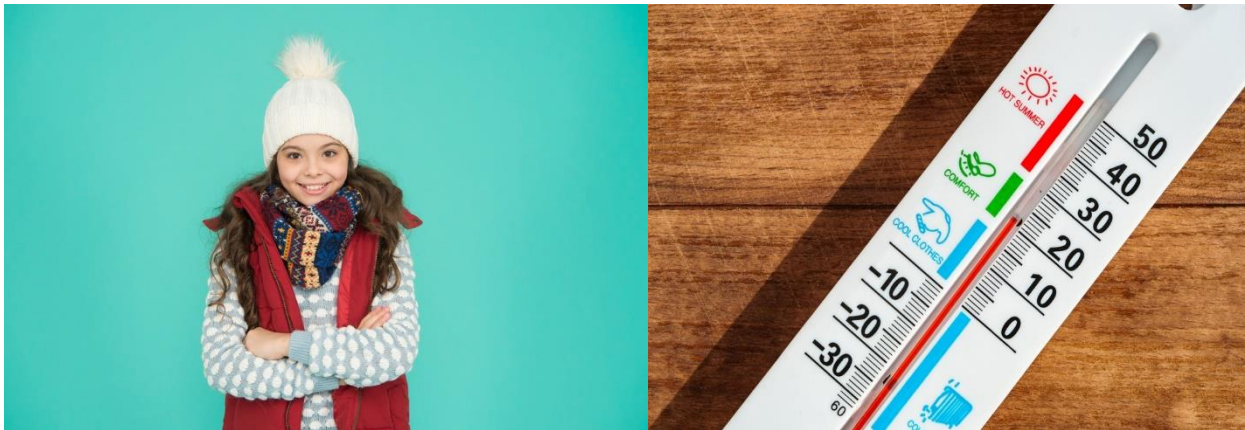
When the temperature starts to drop, it's important to stay warm both at home and when you're out and about.

The Winter period provides prime conditions for circulating coughs, colds and respiratory infections, people stay inside more and cold weather is ideal for spreading of infections. You can catch infections by breathing in droplets or touching surfaces covered in germs then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Regular handwashing with soap and water and avoiding touching your face before you've washed your hands will all help to [prevent infections](#) and is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself and others from illnesses such as food poisoning, diarrhoea, and respiratory viruses such as Flu and coronavirus.

Other things you can do to stay warm and well over winter

Use timers and thermostats to regulate the temperature of rooms where you spend most time, to **at least 18°C** and keep bedroom windows closed at night.



Try not to venture out in very cold or icy conditions unless it is essential. If you do go outdoors, make sure you dress appropriately - remember your hat and wrap up warm, several layers are better than one thick jumper and wear appropriate footwear with good grip.





- Have regular hot meals and hot drinks as these provide warmth and energy.
- Try not to stay still for more than an hour, get up and move around if you can or do seated exercises. Retaining muscle as we age is important as muscles help with stability, prevent falls, and help keep you warm.
- Make sure your heating system is in good working order, it is recommended that boilers are serviced at least once a year by a Gas Safe ® registered engineer and keep their number handy (just in case). It's a legal requirement for landlords to service gas boilers annually.
- Have **boiler flues and chimneys checked** for blockages and cleared if needed. Stock up early on coal or wood, try to make sure you don't run low if cold weather is forecast.
- Contact your energy and water supplier and see if you are eligible to be added to their [priority services register](#), a service that supports people in vulnerable situations
- For more information about local warm spaces and cost of living support visit [Lancashire County Council- keeping warm](#)
- If you have one, [test](#) your smoke alarm each month to make sure it's working properly.
- If you have a carbon monoxide monitor, which should be **EN 50291 compliant** and in the same room as boiler / heating appliances, remember to test it monthly.

Rubber hot water bottles will degrade over time and the general recommendation is to replace them every two to three years. This flower wheel indicates date of manufacture, for more information click [here](#)

Other safety tips include: -

- Allow the boiled water to cool for a few minutes before filling - freshly boiled water can damage the seams of the bottle and cause it to split.
- Don't fill the bottle more than two thirds of its capacity.
- Carefully let out the air from the bottle before putting the stopper on
- Make sure the stopper is screwed on tightly.



Winter vaccinations

Having any [winter vaccinations](#) that you are eligible for, in Autumn or early Winter, is the best way to stay well and protect yourself and those around you especially those who are vulnerable, against winter illnesses including pneumonia.



Vaccination is the **MOST** important thing we can do to protect ourselves against ill health. (NHS)

Influenza (Flu)

Flu is an acute viral infection of the respiratory tract which, for otherwise healthy individuals, is an unpleasant but usually self-limiting disease with recovery between 2- 7 days. However, for those most at risk, flu can be more than a bad cold and may be complicated by and present as more serious infections including bronchitis and secondary bacterial pneumonia.

The risk of serious illness is higher amongst:

- young children under 6 months,
- older people,
- pregnant women **
- Those with underlying health conditions

** Infants under 6 months of age are too young to have the flu vaccine, so it's **important that expectant mothers have a flu vaccination**, which can be given at any stage of their pregnancy.



Flu viruses are highly infectious and change every year, so if you are eligible, it's important to get your free annual [Flu jab](#) in autumn or early winter before flu rates increase. You need a vaccination each year to make sure you are protected against the type of flu virus circulating this winter. **DON'T** assume you are protected because you had a flu jab last year!!

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

[RSV](#) is one of the common viruses that cause coughs and colds in winter, it occurs regularly each year with epidemics generally starting in October, lasting for 4 to 5 months, and peaking in December. Since October 2024 hospitalisations have increased in vulnerable groups but have risen sharply in young children aged 0-4 yrs.

For most people, RSV infection causes a mild respiratory illness, but very young children (under 1 year of age) and the elderly are at greatest risk of more severe respiratory disease. Infants aged less than 6 months frequently develop the most severe diseases such as bronchiolitis and pneumonia, which may result in hospitalisation. RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis in infants with over 60% of children having been infected by their first birthday, and over 80% by 2 years of age.


The RSV vaccine is now recommended for older adults aged 75-79 yrs. and pregnant women.

The best way to protect babies against RSV infection is for the mother to have the vaccine during pregnancy. The vaccine, offered from week 28 of pregnancy, usually by maternity services, reduces the risk of severe RSV lung infection by around 70% in the first six months of life. The vaccine boosts the pregnant woman's immune system to make antibodies that can fight RSV infection, these antibodies pass through the placenta helping to protect the baby from birth.

UK Health Security Agency | NHS

The RSV vaccine is available from September 2024

Offered to:

-  **Pregnant women**
(From week 28 of your pregnancy)
-  **People over 75**
(plus those already aged 75-79 for the first year)

Speak to your midwife, GP practice or health team



Pneumococcal vaccine

[The Pneumococcal vaccine](#) helps protect against serious bacterial illnesses like pneumonia, meningitis, and sepsis, but can also help protect against other illnesses such as sinusitis and ear infections. The vaccine is recommended for babies, people aged 65 years and over and those at higher risk of getting seriously ill from pneumococcal infections. Whilst most babies need two doses, (the first at 12 weeks and a booster dose at 1 year) to protect them, most adults only need one dose for long term protection.

Covid-19 vaccine

The Covid-19 vaccine is an important part of protecting yourself if you are at increased risk of serious illness. Like Flu, the Covid-19 virus changes and protection fades over time, so it's important to top up your protection if you are eligible. The vaccine can help:

- Reduce your risk of getting severe symptoms.
- Help you recover more quickly.
- Reduce your risk of being hospitalised or dying from Covid-19
- Protect against different types of Covid-19

For more information visit [COVID-19 vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

Drink Responsibly

As Christmas approaches, it can be hard not to get carried away with the 'good cheer.'

- Drinking too much, too quickly on a single occasion increases the risk of accidents, resulting in injury or even worse- misjudging risky situations or losing self-control like having unprotected sex or getting involved in violence.
- Try not to drink on an empty stomach. A healthy meal before you go out or start drinking, and snacks between drinks can help to slow down the absorption of alcohol, helping you to stay in control.
- Pace yourself by alternating any alcoholic drinks with water or soft drinks.
- Keep warm and always take a coat. Alcohol makes blood flow to the blood vessels near your skin and away from the core of your body, if you go out in the cold after drinking, you can lose heat very quickly.



Keeping warm and well: staying safe in cold weather

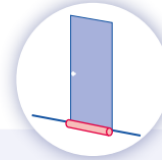
Plan ahead



Check the weather forecast and the news



Make sure you have sufficient food and medicine



Take simple measures to reduce draughts at home

Keep yourself warm



Heat rooms you spend most time in to 18°C if you can



Keep bedroom windows closed



Wear multiple layers of thinner clothing

Prepare your home



Check what financial support may be available for you



Use energy saving tips to save money on heating



Make sure appliances are safe and working well

Look after yourself and others



If you're eligible, get vaccinated against flu and COVID-19



Check on others who may be vulnerable



Get help if needed. Call NHS 111 or in an emergency 999

For more information go to:

[Top tips for keeping warm and well this winter - www.GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

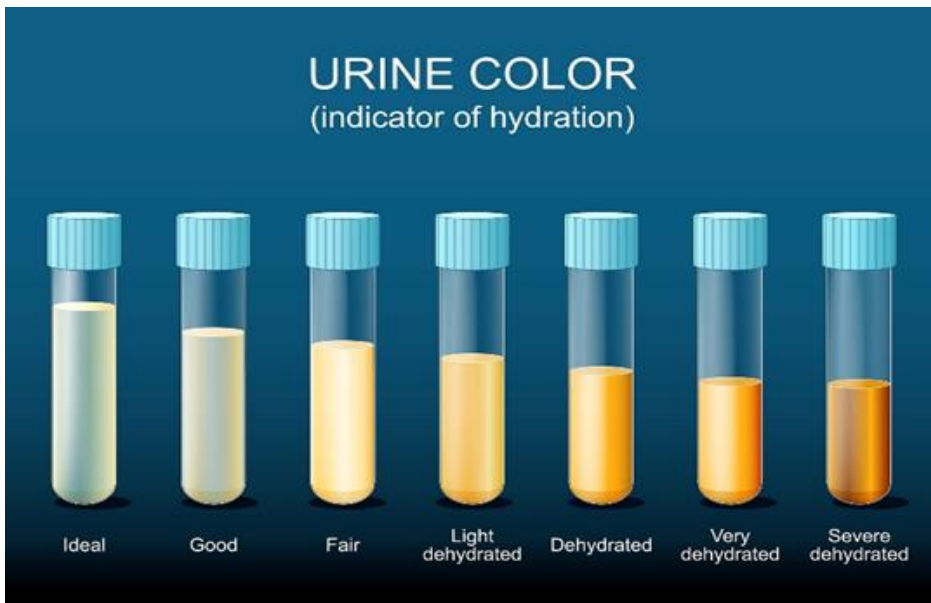


Make sure you stay hydrated

It's vital for people of any age to stay hydrated, ordinarily adults should drink at least 6-8 glasses of clear fluids per day, and it is important to start drinking in the morning and continue to drink regularly throughout the day.

As we age, the sensation of thirst diminishes, which means older people are less likely to realise when they're thirsty. This increased risk of dehydration means older people (or those looking out for them), must stay extra vigilant about their fluid intake this winter to avoid dehydration which can lower blood pressure, causing weakness and dizziness and making falls more likely.

The colour of your urine tells you when you are not drinking enough.



Drinking enough water each day is crucial for many reasons and not just to reduce falls. Keeping hydrated helps to regulate body temperature, keep joints lubricated, and keep organs functioning properly. Drinking enough water also improves sleep quality, cognition, and mood.



Flooding

We know our climate is changing, and whilst we may experience a cold snap more recent winters have been warmer and wetter than average with flooding, caused by extreme rainfall, becoming a bigger issue in Lancashire and across the country. When it rains a lot almost anywhere can flood, even if you don't live near a river.

Health impacts of flooding

Flooding can cause a range of health problems. There may be direct effects such as physical injury, or an increased risk of developing skin or gut infections through contact with contaminated food water. Longer-term effects can include mental health problems and chest problems due to exposure to mould and damp.

The recovery phase following a flood event includes cleaning and drying of your home or property to check for any health harms because of the flood. Floodwater can contain harmful pollutants or contaminants hazardous to humans and animals. When cleaning up a home affected by floodwater, the use of rubber boots, protective overalls or waterproof apron, and waterproof gloves are important to avoid exposure to floodwater.

It's also important to consider the following.

- Thoroughly wash your hands with warm water and soap after each cleaning session and contact with flood water. If you have any open cuts or sores, clean and use waterproof plasters.
- Be careful with electricals and gas; it's advised not to turn gas or electricals if they may have become wet. Only turn them on once they have been checked by a qualified technician.
- Wash clothes used during cleaning on a separate wash cycle from your other clothes.
- Be careful with clean-up as injuries can occur from electrocution or sharp items hidden by flood waters.
- Use hot water and detergent to clean all hard surfaces across your home that may have come into contact with floodwater - this includes walls and flooring.
- Clean and disinfect your kitchen including all countertops, all crockery and cooking items before using them with food.
- Textile items such as clothing, bedding and toys should be washed on a 60°C cycle with detergent.

Further advice and guidance can be found at: [Flooding and health: advice for the public - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/flooding-and-health-advice-for-the-public)



Keep your eye on weather forecasts, sign up to receive [flood warnings](#) and find out if your property is at risk of flooding (or call Flood line for advice Telephone 0345 988 1188 or Textphone 0345 602 6340 this is a 24hour service). If your area is not covered, you can check the long term flood risk for your area [here](#) and find out what you can do to [prepare for flooding and protect your property](#).

The number one cause of death during flooding is driving through flood water. If the road is flooded, the safest advice is turn around, and find another route There's more information about driving and walking in severe weather [here](#)

For more useful information and advice on what to do before, during and after a flood visit Lancashire County Council's flooding [website](#)

Driving over Winter - before you set off



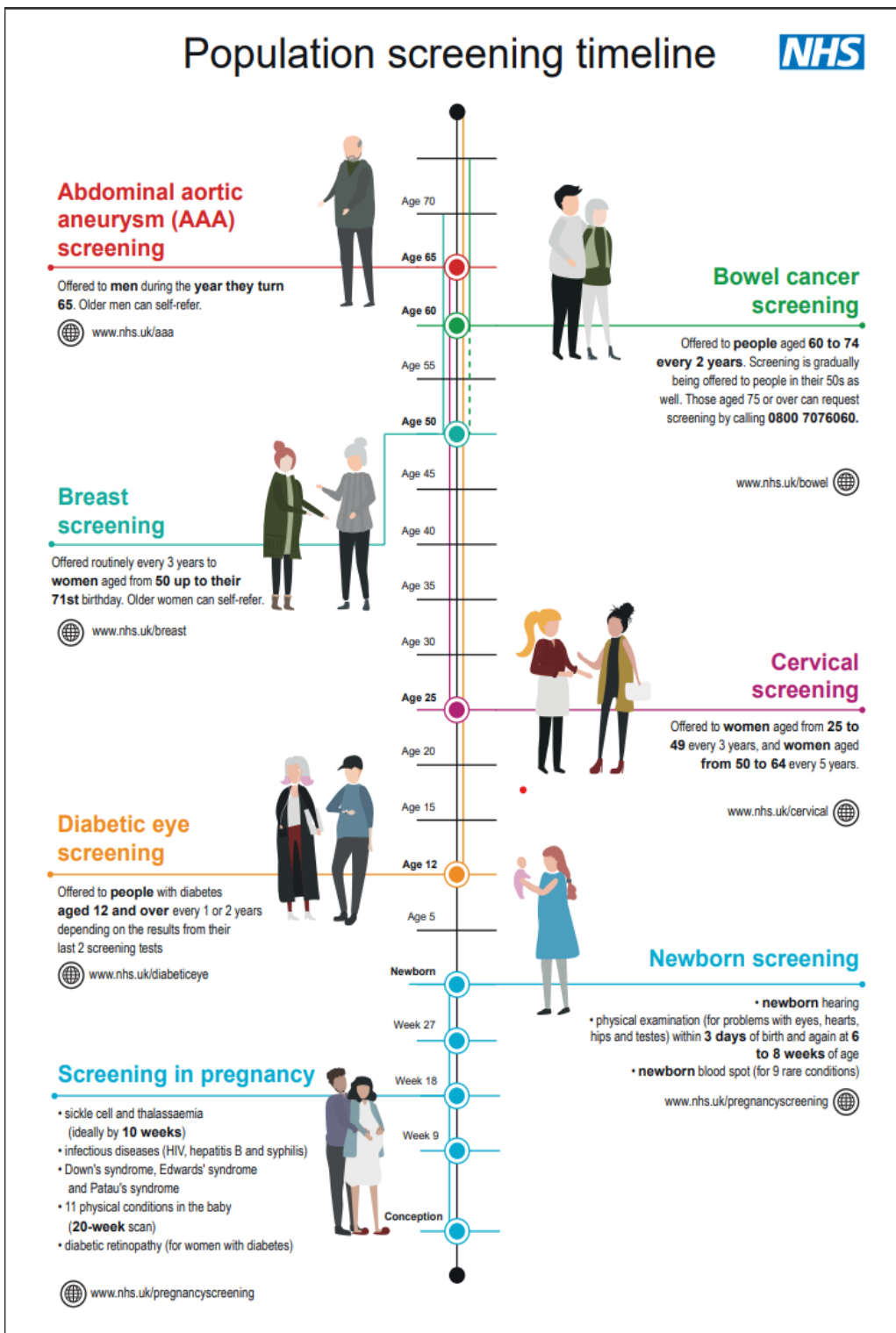
- Top up screen wash and have de icer and an ice scraper handy. **Legally, you must** keep your front and rear windscreen clear of snow and ice before driving.
- Check your lights and indicators - make sure you can be seen.
- Check your tyre tread. Low tread can reduce control of your vehicle especially in wet weather increasing braking distances.
- Check your tyre pressures. If they're over-or under-inflated - even by as little as 10% - it can affect your car's performance, making it more dangerous when braking and steering.
- Carry a [winter kit](#) including - warm clothes, a torch, food and a warm drink.

Screening

Please remember that another thing you can do to protect your health is to attend free health screening invitations throughout the year. The purpose of screening is to identify apparently healthy people, without symptoms, who may have an increased chance of a health problem and getting the right information enables you to make an informed choice and decide what's right for you. Spotting something early means early treatment could be offered giving you a better chance of a more positive outcome.



Winter is cold and dark, and you may be busy but please don't forget to attend a screening appointment if you are invited - it may save your life. It's still important to know what's [normal for your body](#), be aware of any new or worrying symptoms, although its unlikely to be cancer, speak to your GP and get them checked out.



It may be early, but the 'Elf Protection' team would like to wish everyone enjoying any celebrations of whatever faith or non, a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Make this New Years resolution a commitment to attend any screening and vaccination opportunity you are given.



We would welcome any feedback positive or constructive 😊

For further information and support on health protection practice, please do not hesitate to contact the Lancashire County Council Health Protection Team at the following mailbox address: healthprotection@lancashire.gov.uk

Sources: Adapted from various public health protection and safety materials, contact list available.

