

KCC Public Health advice: Severe cold weather warning

Severe weather forecast for the South East this weekend could cause major health risks and residents are urged to follow simple steps to help vulnerable friends, families and neighbours.

A level three cold weather warning has been called for the region by the Met Office which triggers actions in the NHS, public health, social care and other community organisations, to support vulnerable people who have health issues that increase their risk of harm.

The Met Office reports a 90% probability of severe cold weather in Southeast England from Wednesday 7 December to Monday 12 December. Very cold nights are expected with widespread frosts and daytime temperatures just above freezing. Wintry showers are likely to affect some coasts, bringing a risk of icy patches.

KCC Director for Public Health, Dr Anjan Ghosh said: “Cold weather can have impacts on anyone, but people with underlying health problems, such as older people and those who are frail, are at greater risk. Direct effects of winter weather include an increase in incidence of heart attacks, strokes, respiratory diseases such as influenza, falls, injuries and hypothermia.

“Every year, cold weather can lead to extra deaths and it is vital that during this prolonged period of severe weather, people act to keep themselves and their homes warm – even if this is just by heating the bedroom and living room. We’re also urging people to look after vulnerable family and neighbours, and to assist their local community. Taking measures to stay warm and work with others can make a life-changing difference.”

Nationally, there are thousands of excess winter deaths per year because of a drop in temperature.

Kate Langford, Chief Medical Officer at NHS Kent and Medway, said: “Staying warm during cold weather is really important and there are simple steps we can all take to help ourselves and vulnerable friends and family.

“Cold weather can make some health problems worse and some people may need extra help during the winter. Keep in touch with your friends, neighbours and family and ask if they need any practical help, or if they're feeling unwell.

“If you do need NHS help and you’re not sure where to go, visit www.stopthinkchoose.co.uk for a list of local services, including urgent treatment centres.”

Remember to get your flu and Covid-19 vaccines and the Covid-19 booster jab. Find out more about how and when to book flu vaccinations and Covid-19 vaccines.

More information is available about how to keep yourself and others safe during cold weather through www.kent.gov.uk/winterhealth

There are tips below about how to keep yourself and others safe during cold weather, and you can find out more information at www.kent.gov.uk/winterhealth

Keeping your home warm, efficient and safe:

Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing.

Overnight, people who are 65 and over or who have pre-existing health conditions, may find bedroom temperatures of at least 18°C are good for their health; this may be less important if you are a healthy adult under 65 and have appropriate clothing and bedding.

If you can't heat all the rooms you use, heat the living room during the day and your bedroom just before you go to sleep.

Get your heating system and cooking appliances checked and keep your home well ventilated.

If you have an electric blanket, use it as instructed and get it tested every three years. Never use a hot water bottle with an electric blanket.

Do not use a gas cooker or oven to heat your home; it is inefficient and there is a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning which can kill.

If you are not on mains gas or electricity, make sure you have a good supply of heating oil, LPG or solid fuel so you do not run out in winter.

If you need to go out:

Wear shoes with slip resistant, good grip soles.

Make sure you are not caught out by snow and ice; stay tuned to the weather forecast and plan ahead with food supplies.

In periods of severe weather such as snow and ice, do not travel unless necessary.

Get up-to-date traffic information at www.kenttraffic.info

People are urged not to go to A&E or call 999 unless it's an emergency. If you are in any doubt, NHS111 can help you get the right treatment.

Look after yourself:

Sitting or sleeping in a cold room is not good for you and increases the risk of heart attacks, stroke and breathing problems.

Keep your bedroom windows closed on a winter's night; breathing cold air can increase the risk of chest infections.

Exercise is good for you all year round and it can keep you warm in winter.

Keep moving if you can, this will help keep you warm. Try not to sit for more than an hour, get up and walk around, make a hot drink and spread housework throughout the day.

Wear a few layers of thin clothing rather than one thick layer; this will trap the heat better to keep you warm. Thin layers of clothes made from cotton, wool or fleecy fibres are particularly good for maintaining body heat.

Wear shoes with a good grip to prevent slips and falls. Make sure you have spare medication in case you are unable to go out.

Food is a vital source of energy and helps to keep your body warm so have plenty of hot food and drinks.

Aim to include five daily portions of fruit and vegetables. Tinned and frozen vegetables count towards your five a day.

Prepare for cold weather. Stock up on tinned and frozen foods, warm clothes and any medication so you don't have to go out too much when it's cold or icy.

Power and utility companies have schemes which make at-risk groups a priority for reconnection following power cuts. Find out if you meet the criteria and if so, sign up.

Visit <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/consumers/household-gas-and-electricity-guide/extra-help-energy-services/priority-services-register-people-need> for more information

Keep the warmth in by:

Fitting draught proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors.

Making sure you have loft insulation. And if you have cavity walls, make sure they are insulated too.

Insulate your hot water cylinder and pipes.

Draw your curtains at dusk and tuck behind radiators to help keep heat inside.

Make sure your radiators are not obstructed by furniture or curtains.

Get financial help:

There are grants, benefits and advice to help make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. It's worthwhile claiming all the benefits you are entitled to before winter sets in.

For advice on energy bills and energy efficiency, contact Simple Energy Advice:
0800 444202 / <https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/>

Find your way through to the cost of living support available with Kent Together at www.kent.gov.uk/kenttogether

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