

Improving health together

NHS

North Yorkshire and York



www.northyorkshireandyork.nhs.uk/stayinghealthy

Public Health Factsheet

'Thousands more people could survive the winter if they no longer lived in cold, damp homes.' (National Heart Forum)

This factsheet is aimed at frontline healthcare staff. It will highlight how health professionals can make a difference to people's lives and help improve health and wellbeing.

What is fuel poverty?

Fuel poverty is considered to effect any household in which more than 10% of the household income is used to pay for fuel to heat the home (Press, 2003).

Who can help?

The Energy Saving Trust
0800 512 012

Professionals and patients can contact the Energy Saving Trust for impartial advice on how to save money and fight fuel poverty. The Energy Saving Trust will carry out a full assessment and refer patients for the appropriate help and support.

Health and affordable warmth

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How can the cold effect health and wellbeing?

- ◆ **Cardio-vascular disease**
The cold increases blood pressure which increases the risk of heart attacks and stroke¹.
- ◆ **Respiratory illness**
The cold lowers resistance to respiratory infections. Coldness impairs lung function and can trigger broncho-constriction in asthma and COPD.
- ◆ **Mental and social health**
Damp and cold housing is associated with an increase in mental health problems. Some people become socially isolated as they are reluctant to invite friends into a cold house.
- ◆ **Mobility**
Symptoms of arthritis become worse. Strength and dexterity decrease, increasing the risk of accidental injury. A cold house increases the risk of falls in the elderly.

Cold Britain

Excess deaths disproportionately affect the elderly. In Britain, a cold spell during a mild winter is followed:

- ◆ two days later by a sudden rise in **heart attacks** by up to a third
- ◆ five days later by a big rise in the number of **strokes**
- ◆ twelve days later a rise in **respiratory illness**.

Each year, around 20,000 and 50,000 more people aged 65 or over in England and Wales die in winter months than in other months. (The Poverty Site).

What is a suitable indoor temperature?

Above 18°C—no adverse health effects.

Below 16°C—risk of respiratory infections.

Below 12°C—increased blood pressure.

Below 9°C—deep body temperature falls.

(Recommended by the World Health Organisation.)

What causes fuel poverty?

Fuel poverty can be exacerbated by:

- ◆ low income
- ◆ debt
- ◆ poor housing and insulation
- ◆ inefficient or expensive heating systems
- ◆ limited access to affordable fuel
- ◆ limited access to tariff options
- ◆ low occupancy/living alone.

Who may be more at risk?

Households with:

- ◆ single occupant aged 60 plus
- ◆ single occupant under 60
- ◆ couple over 60 (no dependant children)
- ◆ lone parent with child/children.

Increased vulnerability to the cold can be seen in:

- ◆ older people
- ◆ children
- ◆ disabled people
- ◆ those with long-term medical conditions.

Other signs of fuel poverty

- ◆ Home is draughty.
- ◆ Using prepayment meters to avoid debt.
- ◆ Staying in bed more than necessary.
- ◆ Wearing a cardigan/extra clothes in bed.
- ◆ Not wanting to go home from hospital.
- ◆ Damp patches or mould growth.
- ◆ Only one room is heated.
- ◆ Home-made draft proofing.
- ◆ Curtains closed to keep the heat in.
- ◆ Exacerbated symptoms.
- ◆ Slower recovery from illness.

So what can you do to help as a health professional?

If you are visiting patients at home, you will have a vital opportunity to **raise awareness** of the benefits of keeping warm.

Tips for keeping warm:

- ◆ put enough clothes on—wearing several thin layers of clothes keeps you warmer than one thick layer
- ◆ eat hot meals—keep a stock of food in case you cannot get to the shops
- ◆ keep active to generate extra body heat
- ◆ keep a temperature of 21°C in all the rooms used during the day
- ◆ set heating to come on before you get up.

Advice—remember to encourage patients to stay warm and explain the importance for their health and wellbeing.

Download some Keep Warm Keep Well campaign leaflets to help you do this (www.orderline.dh.gov.uk). Keep Warm Keep Well is a national campaign to reduce cold-related illness and deaths during winter.

Awareness—ensure you are up-to-date with the issues facing householders and the sources of support discussed in this factsheet.

Referral pathways—use the single assessment process to identify vulnerable patients to specialist agencies.

Energy Saving Trust 0800 512 012

Department of Health Cold Weather Plan

The plan was published on 1 November 2011 and aims to build on established national and local campaigns for winter health, with a more co-ordinated approach. Two of the essential elements are:

- ◆ Helping GPs and district nurses identify vulnerable patients on their practice lists by providing them with cold weather information and good practice;
- ◆ Ensuring health and social care organisations and voluntary groups implement measures to protect people in their care, and reduce cold-related illness and death in those most at risk. See www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130564 for more information.

Affordable warmth

Achieving affordable warmth requires a multi-agency response and can be reached by a variety of energy efficiency and financial interventions, such as insulation in walls and loft, draught proofing of doors and windows, affordable, controllable whole-house heating, and advice on:

- ◆ energy efficiency
- ◆ fuel debt, budgeting, tariffs and payment methods
- ◆ income maximisation

Ask your patient the following questions to establish the appropriate agencies to refer to:

Recommended Question	Potential Response	Possible Referral Pathways
Is/was your whole house warm enough this/last winter?	YES/NO	If NO refer to Energy Saving Trust 0800 512 012
Do/did you find it difficult to afford your heating and/or bills this/last winter?	YES/NO	If YES refer to: Energy Saving Trust 0800 512 012 For money advice and income maximisation, you can also contact CAB, local authority customer services and/or The Pension Service (see below).
Are your heating and hot water systems easy to use/control?	YES/NO	If NO refer to: Energy Saving Trust 0800 512 012

Local organisations to refer to

Energy Saving Trust

They offer practical advice on how to keep warm this winter, how to access grants and how to help the environment at the same time. The team for North Yorkshire is based in York and covers the whole county. For free and impartial advice from an energy advisor, contact **0800 512 012**.

The Pension Service

For benefit and entitlement queries for over 60s, please call The Pension Service helpline on **0845 606 0265**. If you want to request a visit for help, please request a referral form. The benefit enquiry line disability related queries is **0800 882 200**.

Citizens Advice Bureau

The CAB service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice. www.citizensadvice.org.uk. **0844 4111 444**

Local Authority Customer Services

[North Yorkshire County Council](http://www.northyorkshire.gov.uk) have a Keeping Warm in Winter Service, with a range of information available. Customer Service Centres in Harrogate, Northallerton, Richmond, Ripon, Selby, Scarborough and Skipton. Telephone **0845 034 9410**. [City of York Council](http://www.cityofyork.gov.uk) Customer Centre **01904 55 1550**.

Warm Front

Warm Front makes homes warmer, healthier and more energy-efficient by providing a package of insulation and heating improvements up to the value of £2,700 (or £4,000 if oil central heating is recommended). It is a Government funded initiative. See www.warmfront.co.uk for more details, or you can call on freephone **0800 316 2805** or contact the Energy Saving Trust on **0800 512 012**.

Energy Supplier

Encourage patients to speak to their individual gas and electricity providers about their situation, to find out about tariffs, discounts and the priority services register for pensioners, disabled, sick or vulnerable people.

Age UK

Age Concern and Help the Aged have merged to form Age UK. They aim to promote the wellbeing of all older people and to help make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. www.ageuk.org.uk.

Harrogate	01423 502253
Knaresborough	01423 864956
Northallerton	01609 771624
Richmond	01748 822307
Scarborough & District	01723 379058
Selby	01757 704115
Settle	01729 823066
York	01904 627995

References

References

- ¹ Woodhouse PR, Khaw KT, Plummer M. 'Seasonal variation of blood pressure and its relationship to ambient temperature in an elderly population'. *J Hypertens*. 1993 Nov;11(11):1267-74
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=8301109

Websites

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/InYourHome/KeepingSafeAtHome/DG_10027755



Keep Warm Keep Well national campaign to reduce cold-related deaths during winter. Information and advice how to stay well and what financial support is available.

DH Regional Public Health Group Factsheet

www.dhcarenetworks.org.uk/_library/Resources/Housing/Housing_advice/Health_and_Winter_Warmth_-_Reducing_Health_Inequalities_January_2007.pdf

Factsheet bringing together information and best practice, to enable health professionals to take a much more active role.

Energy Saving Trust

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/



Non-profit organisation that provides free, impartial and expert advice about making your home more energy efficient, including Warm Front grant, local authority energy efficiency grants and "Able to Pay Schemes". Also onward referral for available benefits.

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Call freephone **0800 316 2805**

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/winterhealth/Pages/Winterhealthhome.aspx



Find everything you need to know about winter health, keeping warm, keeping well and energy efficiency advice.

NHS North Yorkshire and York

www.northyorkshireandyork.nhs.uk/StayingHealthy/index.htm



For more information visit the 'Staying Healthy' section of the website. Factsheet 4 is entitled 'Winter health' and may be useful to refer back to for more information on this issue.

Hotspots

The ability of a household to adequately heat their home within a budget they can manage is crucial for the promotion of health and wellbeing, as living in a cold environment can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental health.



Frontline health professionals are well placed to identify patients who may be experiencing physical and mental symptoms of fuel poverty. The hotspots scheme offers frontline staff an opportunity to refer consenting patients, via a simple referral card, for support and advice to help tackle fuel poverty.

To receive a pack of Hotspots referral cards and further information, please contact the Energy Saving Trust advice centre on **0800 512 012**.

Order your free resources

These are the resources recommended by your Public Health team for use with the health and affordable warmth campaign.



Department of Health

Keep Warm Keep Well campaign

Guides for families, people over 60 and people with disabilities or long term conditions are available to download www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/InYourHome/KeepingSafeAtHome/DG_10027755

Age UK

Tel: **0800 169 6565**

www.ageuk.org.uk/publications/health-and-wellbeing-publications/

A range of leaflets including Winter Wrapped Up—how to get yourself and your home ready for winter, and where to go for further information and support.

Age UK Advice: **0800 169 6565**



Production Team:

Rachael Kumar, Health Improvement

Practitioner Specialist

Tel: 01904 601595

Philippa Press, Health Improvement Manager

Tel: 01904 601604

Jacqui Fox, Public Health Information Specialist

Tel: 01756 701765

NHS North Yorkshire and York
Skipton Hospital, Keighley Road
Skipton, BD23 2RJ

Tel: 01756 701765 Fax: 01756 709913

www.northyorkshireandyork.nhs.uk