

Making the Case
Cold Housing
Winter 24/25

Welcome

Firstly, thank you so much for your interest and support in this area of public health. Ensuring residents have a home which supports their health and wellbeing is a key building block to their health.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in.”

Ensuring someone’s home maintains and improves health is one of the key ways to go “upstream” and reduce the chances of them falling in.

You can find out more about the service to support residents, Better Housing Better Health in the [Winter Warmth Coms pack here](#).

The following slides provide some of the background evidence and links to other sources of information if you wanted to make the case for more action.

Support for vulnerable residents

- [BHBH service](#) – energy advice, access to grants
- [Citizens Advice](#) – debt advice
- [Age UK Oxfordshire](#) – social support
- [Livewell Oxfordshire](#) – database of hyperlocal advice and support agencies
- [Handy person schemes](#) – low cost small repairs/maintenance service
- [Map of food banks, larders and community fridges](#) – where to find free/low cost food
- [Fire and Rescue Safe and well visits](#) – fire safety visits

Health in Oxfordshire

- [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) – a database of facts and figures about health in Oxfordshire.
- Winter related health figures can be [found here](#).
- Cold impacts most on those with the following health conditions. Follow the links to get the latest figures on the numbers of residents with these conditions.
 - [COPD](#)
 - [Asthma](#)
 - [Stroke](#), [hypertension](#) and [diabetes](#) (linked to cardiovascular disease)
 - [Heart attacks](#)
 - [Dementia](#)



Fuel poverty

- Due to poor insulation and heating, low income and high fuel prices people find it difficult to stay affordably warm.
- The latest [fuel poverty rate](#) can be found here for Oxfordshire.
- Rates can vary at smaller neighbourhood levels based on income levels and quality of housing. The [Friends of the Earth](#) site here has some indications of where fuel poverty may be higher. Check out their interactive map.
- Homes with a low EPC are at greater risk of being in fuel poverty. To find the EPC for a property [head over here](#). Knowing it can help with working out if someone is eligible for a grant.

Damp and Mould in Homes

- When houses are cold, expensive to heat or have repairs needed damp and mould form. Damp and mould are dangerous to health, especially to the very young and those with respiratory problems like asthma or COPD.
- By ensuring homes are warm, efficient to heat and in good repair damp and mould can be managed.
- In rented properties landlords have an [important role to play](#) to ensure good quality heating, insulation and ventilation.
- Contact the [local council](#) or [housing ombudsman](#) if damp/mould problems are not being resolved.

Climate Action Local Action

- Besides the impact on health and budgets, losing energy through poor loft or cavity wall insulation, burning of fossil fuels for heating impacts on the climate.
- [Community Action Groups](#)
- The Oxfordshire CAG has a network of community groups working on energy efficiency schemes related to insulating homes.
- Visit their page to find out local groups in your area, for example thermal imaging or energy efficiency schemes/events.
- Community Action Groups might have local events and groups which support residents to identify cold homes. Eg Heat Cameras and training



Community Warmth centres

During colder weather there are places where people can go which are warm and can offer social support.

You can find where they are [here](#).

Your [local library](#) also doubles up as a warm space. People are welcome to “feel at home” and can spend time with puzzles and board games. Some libraries also have hot drinks available.

Don't have a computer? Pop into your local library for access to a computer, help to get on line and check out the local notice board for information.



Air Quality

- Besides burning of fossil fuels (gas, oil and production of electricity) producing carbon dioxide impacting on climate, other chemicals are produced.
- Nitrogen Dioxide is produced from gas central heating impacting outdoor air.
- The use of wood burners either for essential or top up heating produces small particles (PM2.5) which are [bad for health](#), in the home.
- If they are an essential heat source
 - ensure chimneys are swept
 - [Ready to burn](#) wood is used only
 - [Appliances are Defra compliant](#).

Reference Library

- [NICE guidance on Excess Winter Deaths](#)
- [Adverse Weather and Health Plan and Cold Weather plan](#)
- [PHE Health Matters Fuel poverty](#)
- [Marmot report](#)
- [Oxfordshire Health and wellbeing strategy](#)
- [Reducing harm from cold weather - Local government's new public health role Who is most likely to live in low energy efficiency homes.](#)

Trusted Tradespeople

Back in April 2023 we carried out a survey of residents needs in staying warm, well and independent in their home and [many reported](#) a barrier was finding trusted traders.

These websites can help.

- [Trust mark](#) – vetted energy installers
- [Buy with Confidence](#) – Trading Standards Scheme
- [Handy person schemes](#) or home improvement agencies
- [Friends against scams](#) – advice if someone is scammed.



What is good for cold snaps is good for heat waves

- Many of the ways of improving the warmth of a home, insulation, closing curtains etc is also helpful as we experience more heat waves.
- Getting help at any time of the year can help keep peoples homes safe for them.
- The [Director of Public Healths Annual](#) report in 2024 focused on climate and health. One of the calls to action was to introduced a summer campaign, [Beat the Heat](#).



Rented properties and Landlords

Landlord responsibilities

- [Damp and mould leaflet](#) – guidance on responsibilities
- [CSE Landlord](#) advice line, including possible funding options
- [Report to Environmental Health](#)
- [Report to](#) the [Housing Ombudsman](#) (Social/council housing)
- [Advice from Shelter](#)

Home owner advice

Retrofit advice and information

- [Oxfordshire County Council](#) – advice on available grants
- [Cosy Homes Oxfordshire](#) – independent advice to home owners.
- [Videos on home energy from Cosy Homes Oxfordshire](#)
- [Videos on Retrofit by Low Carbon Oxford](#)

Living in a listed building or conservation area

- [Oxford Heritage Energy Efficiency tool](#)
- [Historic England Advice](#)
- [Planning advice](#). Follow up with your local planning department at your District or City Council

Inclusion Health groups – reducing inequalities

- For certain people winter may present additional risks.
 - Carers, including young carers – may spend more time at home
 - Gypsy, Roma and Travellers – dwellings have poorer thermal insulation and messaging is not adapted.
 - Domestic Abuse – increase in costs or use of tech/aps
 - Drug and Alcohol use – increased risk of health impacts due to reduced ability to manage/regulate body/home temperature
 - Migrants and asylum seekers - potential language barriers, knowledge and experience of different weather conditions
 - Neurodiversity – e.g. additional warmth needs
 - Learning Disabilities – accessing suitable information to navigate increased costs or changes in heating patterns
 - Care Leavers – costs of heating and energy efficiency knowledge and behaviours
 - Homeless and rough sleepers – exposure to cold
- Sex workers, people in contact with the justice system and victims of modern slavery. We welcome views from these groups as to how cold affects them differently and how we can tailor our messages and support.

Factors that contribute to excess winter deaths

In England and Wales
there are on average around

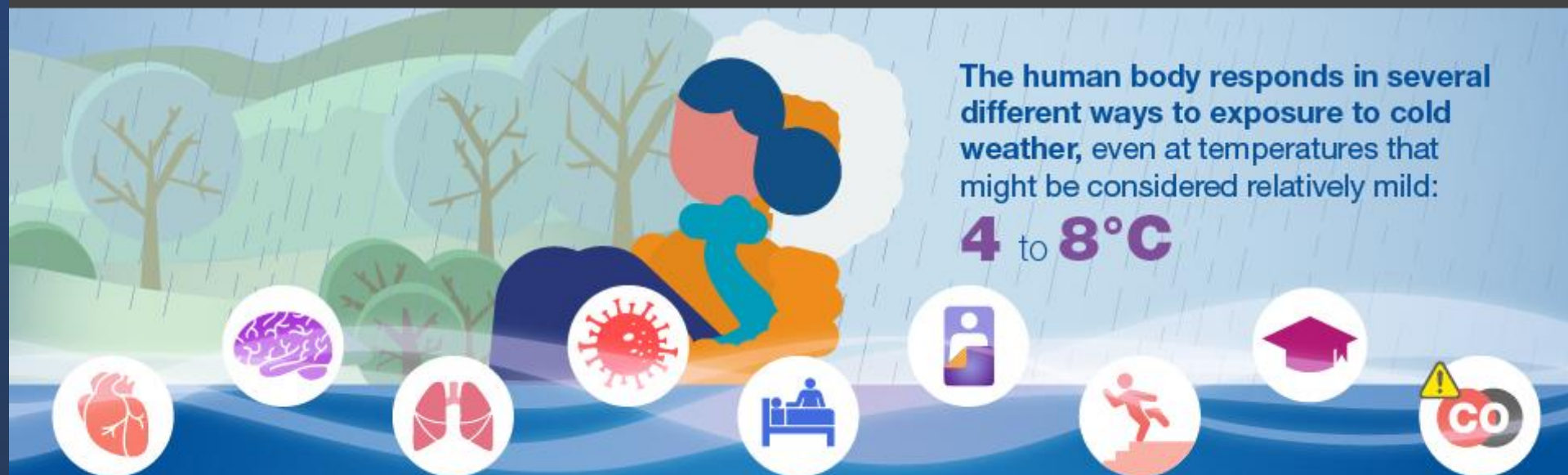
35,000

excess winter deaths (EWD) each year

There are a number of complex and interlinked factors that contribute to excess winter deaths including:

- **seasonal factors** such as the weather and circulating infectious diseases (particularly flu and norovirus)
- **individual vulnerability** to health effects of cold
- **attitudes** to cold and **associated behaviours**
- **housing and economic factors** including inadequate heating, poorly insulated housing, household income, cost of fuel and energy efficiency of the home

The direct and indirect health effects of winter weather



The human body responds in several different ways to exposure to cold weather, even at temperatures that might be considered relatively mild:

4 to 8°C

Direct effects:

- heart attack
- stroke
- respiratory disease
- influenza
- falls and injuries
- hypothermia

Indirect effects:

- snow and ice may cause disruption to healthcare services
- cold homes and fuel poverty are linked with poor mental health and social isolation
- reduced education and employment success
- carbon monoxide poisoning

Groups at greater risk of harm from cold weather

Many of these groups are also at greater risk of severe illness from **COVID-19**



- older people, especially those over 65 years old, particularly those who are otherwise frail and/or socially isolated
- people with pre-existing chronic medical conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory conditions (in particular COPD and asthma) and diabetes
- children
- people with cognitive impairment, mental health conditions or learning difficulties

- people assessed as being at risk of or having had recurrent falls
- people who are housebound or otherwise have low mobility
- people living in deprived circumstances
- people who are living in cold homes and/or are experiencing fuel poverty
- people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping
- pregnant women



How local authorities can help prevent cold-related harm



Feedback

- Any comments or suggestions on this Making the Case slide deck please e-mail healthypaceshaping@oxfordshire.gov.uk