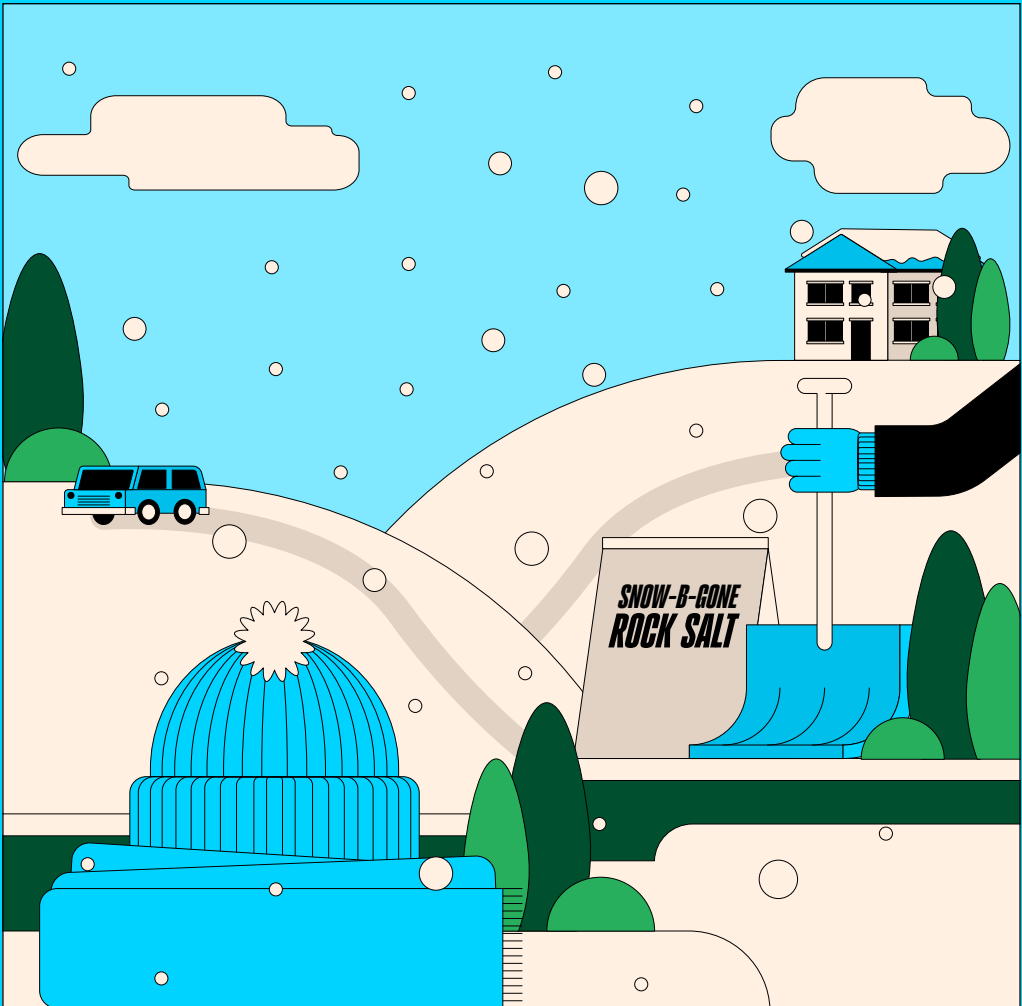


Extreme Cold



Top tips, and vital advice on how to protect yourself.

Community activities to make sure everyone stays safe.

How to prepare, what to do during and what to do after.

Foreword

Across the UK, communities are facing the growing impacts of extreme weather — from prolonged heatwaves and flash flooding to severe cold spells and storms. These events are becoming more frequent and intense due to the climate crisis, posing serious risks to health, safety, and infrastructure, and causing significant disruption to everyday life.

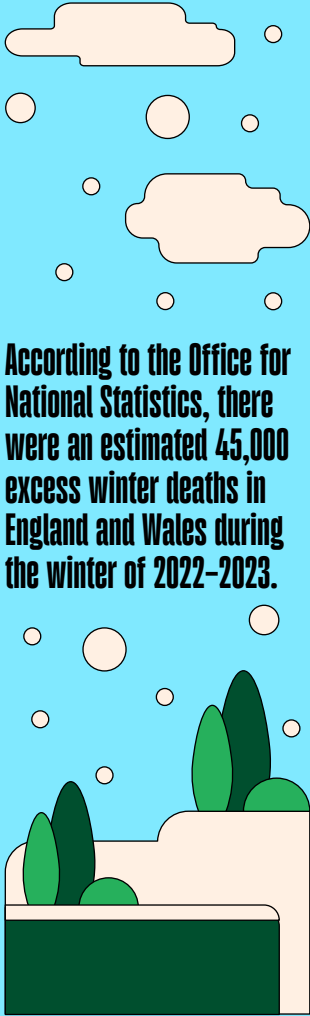
This information pack has been developed through a collaboration between the University of Leeds, London Resilience Unit (Greater London Authority), the ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, and Climate Action Leeds. It is designed to consolidate existing local and national government guidance to support individuals, households and communities in preparing for and responding to extreme weather, wherever they live in the UK.

It is essential to recognise that we are all vulnerable to extreme weather. However, the degree to which we are affected depends on our individual, social, and economic circumstances. Factors such as age, where we live, existing physical and mental health conditions (including neurodivergence, such as autism and ADHD), access to public services, the support we receive from our social networks, and our sense of connection to others in the community all influence how vulnerable we are to different types of extreme weather.

We hope this pack will serve not only as a source of information, but also as a tool to raise awareness about the impacts of the climate crisis and to encourage individuals, households and communities to collaborate, support one another, and take action to prepare for and cope with extreme weather.

Dr Ali Malik
University of Leeds

Louisa Cavell
London Resilience Unit



Introduction

While the UK’s climate is warming overall, the climate crisis is also contributing to increased variability and unpredictability in winter weather. This includes sudden cold snaps, prolonged frost events, and disruptive snowfall.

Even though average winter temperatures are rising, short cold spells still happen and can be severe.

In winter 2022–2023, there were an estimated 45,000 extra deaths compared to normal. These were mainly linked to breathing problems (like asthma), heart problems (such as heart disease or stroke), and living in cold homes. People at higher risk include older adults, babies, pregnant people, and those with conditions like diabetes, dementia, or limited mobility. Some neurodivergent people, such as those with autism or ADHD, may also find it harder to cope with sudden changes or sensory stress during cold weather.

Research shows that living in cold homes for a long time can make existing health problems worse, increase the risk of chest infections, and put extra pressure on health and care services.

People most at risk from extreme cold include older adults, people with disabilities, people struggling to afford enough energy to heat their homes to a safe, comfortable level, or those living in poorly insulated homes. This can also affect young people and students. Conditions that can be made worse by cold include asthma, heart problems, arthritis, diabetes, and mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety.

The cost-of-living crisis has made it even harder for many people to heat their homes properly. Some households cannot afford heating, good insulation, or advice on how to stay warm in winter. Rural and northern areas, where homes are often older and less energy-efficient, are especially at risk from cold-related health problems. Awareness of these risks is often low, particularly among younger people, such as university and college students in shared housing, young adults in low-income jobs, and care leavers or young people living alone without family support.

Project Team
Dr Ali Malik, University of Leeds
Louisa Cavell, Greater London Authority
Caroline Bjørnstad, Researcher, University of Leeds

Project Partners
University of Leeds, Greater London Authority, ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, Climate Action Leeds

What to do before

With increasingly unpredictable winter weather and the higher risk of heavy, disruptive snowfall, icy conditions and cold snaps, it's important to be prepared in order to keep yourself, and your community safe.

• Monitor weather forecasts, to be aware of where and when the cold weather or snow is likely to arrive. • Ensure you have insurance details and important documents, and enough medication and food, to prevent you needing to go out in the cold weather. • Put grit or cat litter on paths and driveways to lessen the risk of slipping on compacted snow. • Create a Winterkit containing: ◦ Torches and batteries, ◦ Candles and matches or lighters, ◦ Plenty of blankets and warm clothing. • Keep an additional Winterkit in your car containing: ◦ Ice scraper and de-icer, ◦ A large torch with spare batteries or a wind-up torch	which doesn't require battery power, ◦ Paper road atlas in case of diversions or getting lost, ◦ In-car phone charger ◦ Warm clothes and blankets – big coat, gloves, a spare jumper, hat and gloves, ◦ Boots with a good grip, ◦ High-visibility clothing, ◦ Jump leads, ◦ Empty fuel can, ◦ Food and drink – hot drinks in a flash, ◦ Shovel, ◦ Warning triangles, ◦ Sunglasses, ◦ First aid kit – sterile cleansing wipes, washproof plasters in assorted sizes, dressings, scissors, nitrile powder-free gloves and a Revive-Aid resuscitation face shield, ◦ Locking wheel nut key.	• Community groups should: ◦ Consider having a designated warm space in the community to help people stay warm and connect with others (but be aware of weather conditions and safe travel precautions for those using the space). ◦ Ensure any relevant activities and actions are mapped out in community emergency plans, so everyone knows what to do when the cold weather arrives.
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Follow this advice to stay safe when driving through heavy snow.

- Avoid driving if you can.
- Accelerate gently, use low revs and change to higher gears as quickly as possible.
- Starting in second gear will help with wheel slip.
- Use a low gear to go down hill and try to avoid braking unless necessary.
- Steer into skids. Do not take your hands off the wheel or slam on the brakes.

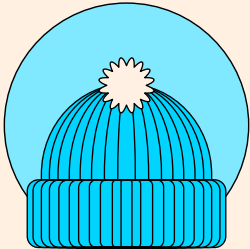
What to do during

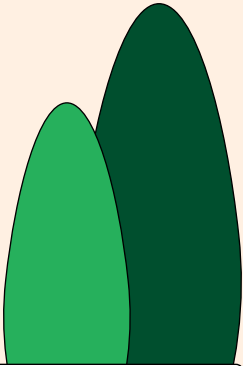
During a cold snap or heavy snowfall, keep yourself safe - whether at home, in the car, or while travelling. Wear warm layers when going outside, and watch for signs of hypothermia (this means your body temperature has dropped too low to stay healthy). If you do notice the signs, move to a warm, dry place, remove wet clothing, wrap up in blankets, sip a warm (non-alcoholic) drink.

• Learn the symptoms of Hypothermia including: shivering, feeling very cold, tired or confused, slurred speech, clumsiness, and pale or cold skin. If your symptoms are severe or don't improve after taking steps to warm up, call 999. • What if you break down somewhere with no phone signal? If you're on the motorway you'll need to locate the nearest emergency phone. On quieter roads, assess the situation - it may be a case of walking to the nearest house or sitting tight and waiting for a passing motorist to stop and help. • Wear protective and warm clothing, with multiple layers better than 1 thick layer. • If you go outside wear several layers of clothing and keep dry to prevent loss of body heat. Watch out for	- signs of hypothermia - uncontrollable shivering, slow/slurred speech, memory lapse and drowsiness and frostbite - loss of feeling in and pale appearance of fingers, toes, nose and ear lobes. Keep moving your arms and legs to help the blood circulate. • Stay inside and keep your indoor temperatures at a safe level. • Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature, both during the day and at night. • Turn off electrical heaters and put out your fire before going to bed to avoid fire risk. • Prevent frozen pipes, open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. • Stay indoors wearing layers of loose fitting lightweight warm clothing rather than bulky clothing.	• Never use a hob or oven to heat your home, they can increase carbon monoxide levels. • Avoid travelling to tourist destinations during extreme weather events. These areas are often harder to access and more exposed to additional hazards like flooding and high winds - tourists heading to scenic or upland destinations may face road closures or become stranded for hours in their vehicles. This not only poses personal safety risks but also places additional pressure on local emergency services, which may already be stretched. • Support with snow clearing initiatives in your community where appropriate and safe, such as shovelling.
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What to do after

After a cold weather event, there are still risks to be aware of, monitoring your heating systems at home and checking on vulnerable members of the community who may not be able to head out in the frosty conditions.

• Be careful when walking or driving on compacted snow - it may have turned to ice. • Take care when shovelling snow. Cold air makes it harder to work and breathe, which adds some extra strain on the body and can be the cause of heart attacks in the vulnerable. • Check heating systems and ensure your home is safe and warm before turning systems back on. • Look out for signs of cold-related illness, such as shivering, confusion, or chest pain. Seek medical help if needed. • Avoid sudden exertion, such as shovelling snow, which can strain the heart. • Report power outages or heating failures to your local authority or energy provider. • Support vulnerable neighbours who may still be without heating or struggling with mobility.	 Wear warm and protective clothing, including hats, gloves and scarves.
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Click here or visit the link below to find out how to stay safe in cold weather.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather/top-tips-for-keeping-warm-and-well-this-winter

Additional Sources of Information

The development of this information pack was funded by the University of Leeds Research Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Fund and is a collaboration between the University of Leeds, the London Resilience Unit, the ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, and Climate Action Leeds.

The London Resilience Unit is part of the Greater London Authority, and delivers and coordinates resilience services on behalf of the London Resilience Partnership and London Local Authorities.

The research underpinning this project, Policing and community resilience in the context of climate change, was funded by the ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre.

The final report for the project can be accessed here: vulnerabilitypolicing.org.uk/policing-and-community-resilience-in-the-context-of-climate-change/

- **The London Community Resilience Toolkit**
londonemergenciestrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/London-Community-Resilience-Toolkit-2025_0.pdf
- **UK Government: Prepare for emergencies**
prepare.campaign.gov.uk/
- **Leeds City Council: Heat in the City**
observatory.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Director-of-Public-Health-Annual-Report-2025-Heat-in-the-city.pdf
- **Met Office: Seasonal advice**
weather.metoffice.gov.uk/warnings-and-advice/seasonal-advice
- **Would you survive 72 hours?**
72tuntia.fi/en/
- **BeFloodReady**
www.befloodready.uk/
- **Communities Prepared**
www.communitiesprepared.org.uk/