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We're here to help you stay well this winter

Some important information from the NHS to help you stay well this winter.

www.nhs.uk

Your
health
matters

Help us
help you



Adebola Adisa, GP

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Help us Help You – Your health matters

Stay well this winter

If you're worried about your health, don't delay, your NHS wants to see you – help us help you get the care you need this winter.

Winter conditions can be bad for our health, especially for people aged 65 or older, and people with long-term conditions such as heart or kidney disease, COPD (including emphysema and chronic bronchitis), asthma or diabetes.

Being cold can raise the risk of increased blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes.

The cold and damp weather, ice, snow and high winds can all aggravate any existing health problems and make us more vulnerable to respiratory winter illnesses. But there are lots of things you can do to stay well this winter.

Suspect you have COVID-19?

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 it's important you get tested as soon as possible:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19, even if they're mild:

- get a PCR test (test that is sent to a lab) as soon as possible to check if you have COVID-19

You can apply for a test online via

www.nhs.uk/coronavirus, or by calling **119**. If you have difficulties communicating or hearing, the service is available by textphone or Relay UK on **18001 119** and the **NHS 119 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter service** at **www.signvideo.co.uk/nhs119**

If you are getting a test because you have symptoms, you must stay at home until you get your result.

Anyone in your support bubble who hasn't received both vaccinations must also stay at home.

If you need medical advice about your symptoms, use the NHS 111 online COVID-19 service **111.nhs.uk/covid-19**, or contact NHS 111 by calling **111**. This service is also available by textphone or Relay UK on **18001 111** and **NHS 111 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter service** via **www.nhs.uk/111**

Feeling unwell and it's not COVID-19 symptoms?

For minor health concerns, your local pharmacy team can help. If you can't get to a pharmacy yourself, ask someone to go for you or call them.

Don't delay, the sooner you get advice, the better. For urgent health concerns, you can contact NHS 111 by phone or online.

GP practices offer remote consultations online or by phone. If you need a face-to-face appointment, they will tell you what to do.

If you need medical help fast or think you need to go to an Emergency Department (A&E), are worried about your symptoms or you're not sure what to do, go straight to NHS 111. The service is available online at **111.nhs.uk** and also by phone, textphone or Relay UK and **NHS 111 BSL interpreter service**.

We tell you more about NHS services at the end of this leaflet.

COVID-19 booster vaccinations

The COVID-19 booster programme is the rollout of an additional vaccine dose to people who have previously received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. It will ensure continued protection for those most at risk.

Booster vaccinations will be given no earlier than six months after completion of the first course of vaccination. We strongly recommend you have the booster to ensure you have maximum protection ahead of the winter months.

The NHS will invite eligible people to book their booster vaccine when it is their turn.

For more information visit
www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination

Make sure you get your flu vaccination

The flu virus strikes in winter and it can be far more serious than you think. Flu can lead to serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and it can be deadly.

That's why the flu vaccine is free if you're aged 50 or over, or if you have a long-term health condition.

If you have young children or grandchildren they may also be eligible for a free nasal spray vaccination.

If you are pregnant you are eligible for a free flu vaccination at any time in your pregnancy; ask your GP practice, pharmacist or midwife. And if you are the main carer of an older or disabled person, you may also be eligible for the free flu vaccine. Just speak to your GP practice or pharmacist. You can also find more information at **www.nhs.uk/flu vaccine**

Also, don't forget that if you're aged 65 or over, or have certain health conditions, you are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine, which will help protect you from pneumococcal diseases such as pneumonia. Ask your GP practice.

Keep warm

It is important to keep warm in winter – both inside and outdoors. Keeping warm over the winter months can help to prevent colds, flu and more serious health problems such as heart attacks, strokes, pneumonia and depression.

Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F). You might prefer your main living room to be slightly warmer.

Keep your bedroom window closed on winter nights.

Breathing cold air can be bad for your health as it increases the risk of chest infections.

Keep active when you're indoors. Try not to sit still for more than an hour or so.

Wear several layers of light clothes. Several layers trap warm air better than one bulky layer.

Make sure you're receiving all the help that you're entitled to. There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. Visit www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk and www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating for further information.

And check your heating and cooking appliances are safe. Contact a Gas Safe registered engineer to make sure they're operating properly. Visit www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Keep active

There's strong evidence that people who are active have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, depression and dementia. Regular exercise can help improve your mental health, reduce the risk of falling and can be beneficial for recovery if you do get ill.

Try to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting down during the day. Break up your time spent being inactive by walking around your home or standing up from your chair during TV advert breaks or when you're on the phone.

There are many activities you could do at home, such as walking up and down stairs, dancing, gardening, housework, or taking part in online fitness classes.

It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it's something you enjoy and keeps you moving. Don't do anything that doesn't feel comfortable and trust your instincts about your own limits. Stop if you are feeling any pain or lightheaded and stay hydrated.

For tips on keeping active go to **www.nhs.uk/keepactive** or have a look at **www.ageuk.org.uk**

Mental health support

We all feel down from time to time, no matter our age. But if you've not been feeling yourself for a while, talking therapy could help you feel better.

Contact your GP practice about talking therapy if you're feeling anxious, low or out of sorts. Your GP is there to help you – physically and mentally – and can refer you to the right service.

If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, you can call your local NHS mental health helpline for 24-hour advice and support:
nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth

Check your medicine cabinet

Ask your pharmacist what medicines should be in your cabinet to help get you and your family through the winter season.

Many over-the-counter medicines (including paracetamol and ibuprofen) are available to relieve symptoms of common winter ailments such as colds, sinusitis or painful middle ear infection (earache).

Your pharmacist can help if you need any advice.

To manage winter illness symptoms at home, you should keep warm, rest, drink plenty of fluids, have at least one hot meal a day to keep your energy levels up and use over-the-counter medications to help give relief.

For more information search 'medicine cabinet' on **www.nhs.uk**

Handwashing

Washing your hands with soap and water is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself and others from illnesses such as food poisoning, diarrhoea, flu and COVID-19.

Wash your hands thoroughly for the amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice (around 20 seconds).

You should wash your hands:

- once you get home, or into work
- after using the toilet or changing a nappy
- before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
- before eating or handling food
- after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
- before and after treating a cut or wound
- after touching animals, including pets, their food and after cleaning their cages

Washing your hands properly removes dirt, viruses and bacteria to stop them spreading to other people and objects. If you do not have immediate access to soap and water then use alcohol-based handrub.

For more information go to **www.nhs.uk/handwashing**

Prescriptions

Make sure you get your prescription medicines before your pharmacy or GP practice closes for Christmas.

And, if you've been prescribed antibiotics or any other medication, **make sure you take them as directed.**

Don't go to a pharmacy if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or are self-isolating. You can order prescriptions via GP or pharmacy websites and apps or by calling them. Ask a friend, relative or volunteer to collect medicines for you.

You can also order your repeat prescriptions via the NHS App, as well as make GP appointments. The NHS App is available on the App Store and on Google Play. For more information visit www.nhs.uk/nhsapp

Look out for other people

Remember that other people, such as older neighbours, friends and family members, may need a bit of extra help over the winter. There's a lot you can do to help people who are more frail than you.

Icy pavements and roads can be very slippery, and cold weather can stop people from getting out and about.

Keep in touch with your friends, neighbours and family and ask if they need any practical help, or if they're feeling under the weather.

Make sure they're stocked up with enough food supplies for a few days, in case they can't go out. If they do need to go out in the cold, encourage them to **wear shoes with a good grip and a scarf around the mouth** to protect them from the cold air, and to reduce their risk of chest infections.

And make sure they **get any prescription medicines before the Christmas holidays start** and if bad weather is forecast.

If they need help over the holiday period when the GP practice or pharmacy is closed or they're not sure what to do, NHS 111 can help. The service is available online at **111.nhs.uk** and also by phone, textphone or Relay UK and **NHS 111 BSL interpreter service**.

By answering questions about their health problem they will be told what to do and where to go. You can also find information at **www.nhs.uk**

NHS Volunteer Responders

NHS Volunteer Responders offer help to people who are self-isolating because they have COVID-19, or because they are avoiding public places because of this virus. If you don't have other support you can get help for a four-week period to collect your shopping and prescriptions or to top up your energy meter (please note that you will need to pay for the shopping and energy credit). You can also arrange for a volunteer to ring up for a friendly chat. If you need help call **0808 196 3646**. Also available by textphone or Relay UK on **18001 0808 196 3646**.

Six things we recommend you do:

- ☐ Make sure you get your flu vaccination.
- ☐ Come forward for your COVID-19 booster when offered.
- ☐ Keep your home at 18°C (65°F) or higher if you can.
- ☐ Take advantage of financial schemes and discounts to help you pay for heating.
- ☐ Contact NHS 111 online or by phone if you are worried about any symptoms.
- ☐ Look out for other people who may need a bit of extra help over the winter.

Make a note of your surgery and local pharmacy numbers.

Where to go for the right medical help

Dial 999 for life-threatening emergencies

You can text the emergency services on **999** but you need to register your phone in advance. To find out more go to **[emergencysms.org.uk](https://www.emergencysms.org.uk)**

Contact NHS 111

If you need medical help fast or think you need to go to an Emergency Department (A&E) use NHS 111 first – online at **111.nhs.uk** or by phone – to get clinical advice or direction to the most appropriate services for treatment.

This service is also available by textphone or Relay UK on **18001 111** and **NHS 111 BSL interpreter service** via **www.nhs.uk/111**

GP, Pharmacy and www.nhs.uk

For all other health needs, contact your pharmacy or GP practice. You can also access NHS advice and information at **www.nhs.uk**

A reminder of NHS 111 and 119 services

If you have symptoms of coronavirus, get tested as soon as possible; apply via **www.nhs.uk/coronavirus**, or call **119**. The service is also available by textphone or Relay UK on **18001 119** and **NHS 119 BSL interpreter service** at **www.signvideo.co.uk/nhs119**

If you are worried about your symptoms, use the NHS 111 coronavirus service at **111.nhs.uk/covid-19** or contact **111** if you cannot get help online.

This leaflet is available in alternative formats at **www.nhs.uk/staywell**

Email **partnerships@phe.gov.uk** for braille copies.

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