



Public Health
England



Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG

T +44 (0)20 7654 8000
www.gov.uk/phe

**To: Local Authority Chief Executives
Local Authority Directors of Public Health
NHS England Area Teams
Clinical Leads of Clinical Commissioning Groups**

CC: Accountable Officers of CCGs, LA Emergency Planning Officers, NHS Trust CEs, NHS Foundation Trust CEs, NHS Trust Medical Directors, NHS Trust Nursing Directors, Foundation Trust Medical Directors, GPs, Directors of Housing and Planning, Directors of Adult Social Services, Directors of Children Social Services, DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division and Local Resilience Forums, PHE Region and Centre Directors, Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Healthwatch England CE, Monitor CE, Care Quality Commission CE, Professional Bodies (RCGP, RCP, RPSGB, RCN, CPHVA, FPH), Carers UK

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25 October 2013

Re: COLD WEATHER PLAN FOR ENGLAND 2013: *Protecting health and reducing harm from cold weather*

This letter is to alert you to the publication of the Cold Weather Plan for England 2013. From today, the following documents will be available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cold-weather-plan-for-england-2013>:

- The Cold Weather Plan for England 2013
- Making the Case: why long-term strategic planning for cold weather is essential for health and wellbeing
- “Action cards” based on the plan
- Cold Weather Plan Equality Impact Assessment

Severe cold weather is a major public health challenge in England; the effect of cold weather on health is a significant, yet often unrecognised factor causing death and illness in the country. The Cold Weather Plan for England aims to prevent avoidable harm to health, by alerting people to the negative health effects of cold weather, and enabling them to prepare and respond appropriately.

The plan recommends a series of steps, to be taken throughout the year, to reduce the risks to health from cold weather for:

- the NHS, local authorities, social care, and other public agencies
- professionals working with people at risk
- individuals, local communities and voluntary groups

The plan continues to be underpinned by a system of cold weather alerts, developed with the Met Office. This operates in England from 1 November to 31 March. During this period, the Met Office will issue alerts on the basis of either of two measures: low temperatures of 2°C or less; and/or heavy snow and ice.

Summary of key changes to the Cold Weather Plan for England 2013

Cold Weather Plans for England were published by the Department of Health in 2011 and 2012. Responsibility for publishing the plan has now passed to PHE, and this 2013 edition of the plan is published in partnership with NHS England, the Local Government Association and the Met Office.

Most of the actions identified in the Cold Weather Plan 2012 are carried forward into the 2013 edition. Key changes for the plan this year include:

- updated responsibilities and actions for healthcare organisations, local authorities and professionals in light of the changes made to health and social care as of 1 April 2013
- emphasis on actions to be taken at level 0 (year round planning) and level 1 (winter preparedness and action) to prevent the greatest burden of morbidity and mortality
- emphasising the importance of a long-term strategic approach by health and wellbeing boards and commissioners and linking action to the Public Health Outcomes Framework
- a clearer distinction between the health effects and interventions for cold temperatures, and those for snow and ice

Cold Weather Alerts

To support the Plan, the Met Office will issue Cold Weather Alerts from 1 November 2013 to 31 March 2014. There are five levels:

- Level 0 (long term planning, all year)
- Level 1 (winter preparedness and action, 1 Nov to 31 March)
- Level 2 (severe winter weather is forecast¹)
- Level 3 (response to severe winter weather²)
- Level 4 (major incident – declared by central government)

¹ mean temperature of 2°C and/or widespread ice and heavy snow are predicted within 48 hours, with 60% confidence

² mean temperature of 2°C and/or widespread ice and heavy snow is now occurring

Recommended next steps

The plan is a good practice guide and the actions denoted within it are illustrative. There are five key messages we recommend to all local areas, particularly in view of recent structural changes to the health and care system:

1. All local organisations should consider this document and satisfy themselves that the suggested actions and Cold Weather Alerts are understood across the system, and that **local plans are adapted as appropriate** to the local context.
2. NHS and local authority commissioners should satisfy themselves that the distribution of **Cold Weather Alerts will reach those that need to take action**, especially in light of recent structural changes.
3. NHS and local authority commissioners should satisfy themselves that **providers and stakeholders take appropriate action** according to the Cold Weather Alert level in place and their professional judgements.
4. Opportunities should be taken for closer partnership working with the **community and voluntary sector** to help reduce vulnerability and to support the planning and response to cold weather.
5. Long-term planning and commissioning to reduce cold-related harm is considered **core business by health and wellbeing boards** and included in joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies.

I hope that you and copy recipients of this letter will discuss the suite of documents that make up the Cold Weather Plan 2013 with those organisations and teams that need to start taking action now, in order to protect our population from cold-related harm.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Cosford
Director of Health Protection and Medical Director, Public Health England



Felicity Harvey
Director General for Public Health, Department of Health



Jon Rouse,
Director General for Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnerships,
Department of Health



Sarah Pinto-Duschinsky,
Director of Operations and Delivery, NHS England



Councillor Katie Hall
Chair of Community Wellbeing Board, Local Government Association