

Cold Weather Plan for England 2022/23 - Communications Toolkit

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Official UKHSA winter comms twitter hashtag: #coldweather

#WeatherReady – Levels 0 and 1

#WeatherAware – Levels 2, 3 and 4

#StayWellThisWinter

1. INTRODUCTION

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 is published by the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) but developed collaboratively in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, the Local Government Association and others including the voluntary and community sector.

The plan sets out a series of steps 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

Like the Cold Weather Plan, this toolkit should be viewed as an aid to be adapted locally and form part of existing local communications strategies; it is not a set of directions. It provides pre-prepared materials that can be shared with your social media teams.

Timing

In September 2022, UKHSA stakeholders were notified about the cold weather plan for England and the forthcoming winter alerting period. The content and actions within the plan remain unchanged. The Cold Weather Alerting Service begins on **1 November and runs until 31 March**. However, if alert thresholds are reached outside of this period an extraordinary Cold Weather alert will be issued and stakeholders are encouraged to take action, including comms activities.

Cold weather health risks and respiratory infections

The winter season brings an increased risk to respiratory infections, such as flu and COVID-19. It is critical that actions to prevent health harms from cold temperatures and winter weather continue, including identifying and supporting those at risk, with necessary adaptations in line with guidance to keep everyone safe.

Potential interactions:

1. Shared risk factors amongst population sub-groups affected by both cold temperatures and respiratory infections
2. Clinical impacts arising due to concurrence of cold weather and respiratory infections
3. Increased exposure to cold temperatures due to change in patterns of energy use at home, fuel poverty and reduced access to warm public spaces
4. Social and community networks, access to resources
5. System level risks related to concurrency of impacts, change in patterns of health and social care use, access and delivery and health seeking behaviour

Key recommendations:

1. All local authorities, NHS commissioners and their partner organisations, including health and social care providers, should consider the [Cold Weather Plan for England](#) and satisfy themselves that the suggested actions and the cold weather alert service are understood across their locality, and potential additional need has been considered in surge capacity plans.

2. People at risk from cold weather may also be vulnerable to respiratory infections, including flu and COVID-19 infection. This can be due to concurrence of both clinical and environmental/socio-economic factors. Identify those at greatest risk this winter, considering intersecting risks. Ask about living in a cold home and support vulnerable individuals to access existing resources to keep warm.

2. KEY PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGES

You can also use these to base public health advice for other press statements and social media.

Keeping your home warm, efficient and safe:

Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing.

- Cold weather can have a serious impact on health, and it is therefore important to try and heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, particularly if you have reduced mobility, are 65 and over, or have a health condition such as heart or lung disease.
- Overnight, people who are 65 and over or who have pre-existing health conditions, may find bedroom temperatures of at least 18°C are good for their health; this may be less important if you are a healthy adult under 65 and have appropriate clothing and bedding.
- If you can't heat all the rooms you use, heat the living room during the day and your bedroom just before you go to sleep.
- Get your heating system and cooking appliances checked and keep your home well ventilated.
- If you have an electric blanket, use it as instructed and get it tested every three years. Never use a hot water bottle with an electric blanket.
- Do not use a gas cooker or oven to heat your home; it is inefficient and there is a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning which can kill.
- If you are not on mains gas or electricity, make sure you have a good supply of heating oil, LPG or solid fuel so you do not run out in winter.

Look after yourself:

- Keeping well will allow you to do more and keep your independence. Being cold isn't just uncomfortable it can be bad for your health. Sitting or sleeping in a cold room is not good for you and increases the risk of heart attacks, stroke and breathing problems. Don't let the cold catch you out, check the weather forecast and be ready for cold weather.
- Keep your bedroom windows closed on a winter's night; breathing cold air can increase the risk of chest infections.
- Exercise is good for you all year round and it can keep you warm in winter.
- Keep moving if you can, this will help keep you warm. Try not to sit for more than an hour, get up and walk around, make a hot drink and spread housework throughout the day.
- Wear a few layers of thin clothing rather than one thick layer; this will trap the heat better to keep you warm. Thin layers of clothes made from cotton, wool or fleecy fibres are particularly good for maintaining body heat.
- Wear shoes with a good grip to prevent slips and falls. Make sure you have spare medication in case you are unable to go out.
- Food is a vital source of energy and helps to keep your body warm so have plenty of hot food and drinks.
- Aim to include five daily portions of fruit and vegetables. Tinned and frozen vegetables count towards your five a day.
- Prepare for cold weather. Stock up on tinned and frozen foods, warm clothes and any medication so you don't have to go out too much when it's cold or icy.
- Power and utility companies have schemes which make at-risk groups a priority for reconnection following power cuts. Find out if you meet the criteria and if so, sign up. Visit <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/consumers/household-gas-and-electricity-guide/extra-help-energy-services/priority-services-register-people-need> for more information

Look after others:

- All of the advice for looking after yourself can be used to plan how to help others.
- Check on frail or older neighbours or relatives, especially those living alone or who have serious illnesses to make sure they are safe, warm and well.
- Ask about living in a cold home and support vulnerable individuals to access existing resources to keep warm.
- Those with care responsibilities, whether that's for family members or on a professional or voluntary basis, should consult the [Cold Weather Plan for England](#) for a range of useful advice.

- In advance of winter, carers should be aware of how to refer to local housing and health services if further support is required. **Simple Energy Advice** provides free advice on energy efficiency & National grants to help with energy bills: **0800 444202** www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk
- Charities, social and health care organisations should ensure that carers of those most at-risk are getting the support and advice they need to protect those who may be vulnerable to the ill-effects of cold weather.

Keep the warmth in by:

- Fitting draught proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors.
- Making sure you have loft insulation. And if you have cavity walls, make sure they are insulated too.
- Insulate your hot water cylinder and pipes.
- Draw your curtains at dusk and tuck behind radiators to help keep heat inside.
- Make sure your radiators are not obstructed by furniture or curtains.

Get financial help:

- There are grants, benefits and advice to help make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. It's worthwhile claiming all the benefits you are entitled to before winter sets in.
- For advice on energy bills and energy efficiency, contact Simple Energy Advice: **0800 444202** / <https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/>

3. COLD WEATHER ALERT SYSTEM

UKHSA's Cold Weather and Heat-Health Alerting Service, operated by the Met Office, begins on 1 **November and runs until 31 March**. UKHSA, with the Met Office, may issue cold weather alerts outside this period if trigger criteria are met.

Alert Service platform from 1 November 2022 to 31st March 2023

To sign up to receive cold weather and heat alerts visit:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKMETOFFICE/subscriber/topics?qsp=PHE>

For any technical problems regarding the alert service, use the following email: subscriberhelp@govdelivery.com

For general enquires regarding this service: enquiries@metoffice.gov.uk

UKHSA Regional Communications colleagues will work in partnership with local organisations to provide necessary advice and support on local communication activity which will be dependent on the level declared locally and nationally.

The Met Office will use the hashtags below in social media communications, which UKHSA will support with health advice.

Partner organisations are encouraged to support these hashtags and weave the following health advice into their messages.

Where appropriate, the Met Office and UKHSA will try to use;

- **#WeatherReady** to support activity relating to the cross-Government campaign urging the public to prepare themselves for winter and cope with severe weather, i.e., get your flu jab, check your heating, ensure houses are properly insulated/ boilers serviced etc.
- **#WeatherAware** for 'weather warning' alerts levels 2 to 4

This hashtag will be used for severe weather warning content. This is about being alert and taking action, i.e., wear more layers of clothing and non-slip shoes if you go out, clear pavements, responding to weather alerts etc.

#StayWellThisWinter is the hashtag which is being used as the 'brand' of several associated winter campaigns and initiatives.

The Cold Weather Alert System:

Level	
0	Year-round planning All year
1	Winter preparedness and action programme 1 November to 31 March
2	Severe winter weather is forecast – Alert and readiness Mean temperature of 2°C or less for a period of at least 48 hours and or widespread ice and heavy snow are predicted, with 60% confidence
3	Response to severe winter weather – Severe weather action Severe winter weather is now occurring: mean temperature of 2°C or less and or widespread ice and heavy snow
4	Major incident – Emergency response Central Government will declare a Level 4 alert in the event of severe or prolonged cold weather affecting sectors other than health

More information on the Cold Alert System is available here:

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/coldweatheralert/>

4. SUGGESTED SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES FOR ALERTS

Below are suggested baseline winter health messages per cold weather alert levels you can post, adapt and tailor to your own communications.

- Useful twitter handles: @cabinetofficeuk, @MetOffice, @UKHSA, @DHSCgovuk, @LGAcomms, @NHSEngland.
- Useful to flag NHS how to stay well in winter webpage including tips to prevent winter health illnesses: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/keep-warm-keep-well/>
- Also useful to flag - UKHSA's Keep Warm Keep Well leaflet, available at: 'Keep Warm Keep Well' leaflet - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Level 1 #winterready	Winter action programme <i>1 November – 31 March</i>
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Level 1 Twitter

- Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing #WeatherReady.
- Older people are entitled to help with energy bill payments over winter – to find out more visit: <https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/eligibility> #WeatherReady
- For info on assistance for older people (winter fuel payments & cold weather payments) see <https://www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment/overview> #WeatherReady
- Contact your landlord about ways to improve the energy efficiency of your home & staying warm in winter #WeatherReady
- Get your boilers, heaters & cookers regularly serviced by a registered engineer to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning #WeatherReady
- If cold weather is forecast, stock up on tinned and frozen foods, warm clothes and any medication #WeatherReady
- If you have a chimney or flue, ensure it is regularly checked for blockages and swept if needed #WeatherReady
- Look out for vulnerable people, prepare emergency contact numbers & protect water pipes from freezing by insulating them #WeatherReady

- Tips to prevent illnesses associated with #coldweather from @NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/keep-warm-keep-well/>
- Check the @MetOffice weather forecast before heading out. Be #WeatherReady for the cold, dress warmly, look out for vulnerable people.

Level 2 #weatheraware	Severe winter weather is forecast - Alert and readiness <i>Mean temperature of 2°C and/or widespread ice and heavy snow are predicted within 48 hours, with 60% confidence.</i>
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Level 2 Twitter

- @UKHSA says be #WeatherAware and look out for vulnerable people. Stay tuned to @MetOffice forecasts as cold temperatures predicted
- Have plans in place to check on others safely in advance of the cold weather (e.g., by phone)
- Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing #WeatherAware
- Keeping curtains closed and tucked behind radiators helps to trap heat #WeatherAware
- When indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour. Get up and stretch your legs #WeatherAware
- During #coldweather make sure you are stocked up with food and medicine to minimise the need to leave home #WeatherAware
- Keeping warm keeps you well: have regular hot meals & drinks, wear a few layers of thin clothing rather than 1 thick layer #WeatherAware
- Check @MetOffice forecasts, wear thin clothing layers rather than 1 thick one and soles with good grip if heading out #WeatherAware
- @MetOffice forecasts snow and ice this week. Top tips to clear snow and ice from pavements here #WeatherAware
- Limit time outdoors if you're at a higher risk of cold-related illness or falls #WeatherAware
- Get help if you need it. Call your GP, pharmacist, carer or health professional for advice #WeatherAware

Level 2 Facebook:

Severe weather is forecast across England

Cold weather **or heavy snow and ice (IF APPROPRIATE)** is predicted to be widespread. Keep wrapped up warm and check on older people and neighbours. Talk to neighbours and friends about clearing snow and ice in front of your house and public walkways nearby if you can't do this yourself. If you can, try to keep the rooms you use heated to at least 18°C.

Encourage those who may find it more difficult to cope in cold weather to request help through volunteer networks, for example the [Royal Voluntary Service website](#)

Advice on keeping warm is available from <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/winterhealth/Pages/KeepWarmKeepWell.aspx>

Level 3 #weatheraware	Response to severe winter weather – Severe weather action <i>Severe winter weather is now occurring. Mean temperature of 2°C or less and/or widespread ice and heavy snow</i>
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Level 3 Twitter:

- @MetOffice says #coldweather across areas of **INSERT AREA AND TIME**. Keep yourself warm and look out for others #WeatherAware
- Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing #WeatherAware
- @MetOffice issued #coldweather alerts across **INSERT PLACE**. Dress warmly, keep active and clear icy pavements if possible. #WeatherAware
- Throughout #winter, have plenty of warm food and drinks to keep you warm & safely check on vulnerable people #WeatherAware
- When indoors, try not to sit still for more than an hour. Get up and stretch your legs #WeatherAware
- IF APPROPRIATE With #ice & snow outside – if you can, clear your drive & paths to prevent accidents #WeatherAware
- @MetOffice forecasts #coldweather in **INSERT AREA AND TIME** Be #WeatherAware before going out, dress warmly, wear shoes with good grip

Level 3 Facebook:

Severe winter weather

The Met Office is urging caution during winter weather conditions.

Dress warmly, wear shoes with good grip if heading outside, and look out for vulnerable people.

If you can, clear your drive & pathways of snow or ice to prevent accidents and if you can, keep the rooms you use heated to at least 18°C.

Ensure you have plenty of warm food and drinks to keep you warm. More info on:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/seasonal-health/keep-warm-keep-well/>

Level 4 #weatheraware	Major incident – Emergency response <i>Central Government will declare a Level 4 alert in the event of severe or prolonged cold weather affecting sectors other than health.</i>
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During a Level 4 incident, all of the messages from Level 3 still apply; however, further messages are likely to follow from Central Government and the Cabinet Office. Please keep an eye on Cabinet Office’s website and social media channels for these.

Cabinet Office updates:

- Visit website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office>
- Follow their twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/cabinetofficeuk>

Level 4 Twitter

Public messages:

- @MetOffice issued Level 4 #coldweather alert – More info on @cabinetofficeuk website #WeatherAware
- Try to heat the rooms you use to at least 18°C if you can, as this reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing #WeatherAware IF APPROPRIATE With #ice & heavy snow across the country – if you can clear your drive & pathways prevent accidents #WeatherAware

- @MetOffice says #coldweather across areas of **INSERT AREA AND TIME** keep yourself warm and look out for others #WeatherAware
- @MetOffice forecasts severe #coldweather in **INSERT AREA AND TIME**. Be #WeatherAware before going out, dress warmly, wear shoes with good grip
- Throughout #winter, have plenty of warm food and drinks to keep you warm & check on vulnerable people #WeatherAware@MetOffice issued Level 4 #coldweather alerts across **INSERT AREA**. Dress warmly, keep active and clear icy pavements if possible. #WeatherAware

Level 4 Facebook:

Severe cold weather – emergency response

Central Government has declared a major 'Level 4' cold weather incident due to the harsh weather conditions affecting England.

Take care and refer to the Cabinet Office's website for further instructions

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office>

Dress warmly, have plenty of warm food and drinks to keep warm and look out for vulnerable people.

5. Frequently Asked Questions

How many people die during winter in the UK?

On average, there are approximately 30,000 excess winter deaths per year in England, many of which are preventable. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures suggest excess winter deaths contribute to about 1 in 20 of all deaths per year. The causes of death are complex, interlinked with fuel poverty, poor housing and health inequalities, cardiovascular disease as well as influenza and norovirus.

Do respiratory infections spread more easily because people are indoors throughout the winter?

People spend significantly more time indoors during winter and this can increase the spread of infections more easily. The risk of transmission indoors is likely to be increased by housing factors such as poor ventilation in winter months and an increased density of virus particulates accumulating in a room. Fuel poverty, noise pollution and security concerns can be barriers to good ventilation in winter. Overcrowding, poor housing and deprivation are also shared risk factors for poor health that may also increase the risk of transmission.

How do circulating infections affect excess winter deaths?

Certain infections are more common during the winter, particularly influenza and norovirus. Influenza is responsible for a number of deaths each year and affects the same vulnerable groups as cold weather. It is often challenging to disentangle which of the excess deaths over winter are due to circulating diseases and which are due to cold.

What do most people die from during the winter?

Circulatory system diseases account for 40% of excess winter deaths, such as heart attacks and strokes. Around one third of excess winter deaths are due to respiratory illness.

What does 'excess winter deaths' mean?

Excess Winter Deaths (EWD) is a measure of the 'extra' deaths that occur in the winter months compared to the rest of the year. This is why we call them 'excess winter deaths'.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) calculates the excess winter deaths each year. This is calculated as winter deaths (deaths occurring in December to March) minus the average of non-winter deaths (deaths occurring in the preceding August to November plus deaths occurring in the following April to July divided by two).

$$\text{Winter deaths} - \text{average non-winter deaths} = \text{EWD}$$

The Excess Winter Deaths Index (EWD index) is calculated so that comparisons can be made between sexes, age groups and regions. It is calculated as the number of excess winter deaths divided by the average non-winter deaths, expressed as a percentage:

$$\text{EWD Index} = (\text{EWD} / \text{average non-winter deaths}) \times 100$$

What are the main impacts of cold weather on health / why do people die?

Cold weather can have impacts on anyone, but people with underlying health problems, such as older people and those who are frail, are at greater risk. Direct effects of winter weather include an increase in incidence of heart attacks, strokes, respiratory diseases such as influenza, falls, injuries and hypothermia. Indirect effects of cold include mental health illnesses such as depression and risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if boilers or cooking and heating appliances are poorly maintained or poorly ventilated.

Other countries have cold winters; does it happen there too?

Other countries in Europe do see higher numbers of deaths in the winter when compared to other times of the year. However, the UK continues to have higher levels of excess winter deaths when compared to other, often colder, European countries. The reasons are not completely clear and are interlinked with people's behaviours and housing.

What indoor temperatures reduce the harmful effects on health?

Heating the rooms you use to at least 18°C reduces the risk to health of someone wearing suitable winter clothing. Heating to at least 18°C is particularly important if you have reduced mobility, are 65 and over, or have a health condition, such as heart or lung disease.

Overnight, people who are 65 and over or who have pre-existing health conditions, may find bedroom temperatures of at least 18°C are good for their health; this may be less important if you are a healthy adult under 65 and have appropriate clothing and bedding.

What temperatures pose a threat to health?

Temperature	Effect
18°C (65°F)	Heating your home to at least 18°C reduces the risk to health of a sedentary person wearing suitable winter clothing.
Under 18°C	May increase blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular disease
Under 16°C	May diminish resistance to respiratory diseases
4 - 8°C	Mean outdoor temperature threshold at which increased risk of death is observed at a population level
Less than 5°C	Poses a high risk of hypothermia

Snow and ice can pose a risk to health by disrupting service provision, reducing access to essential services (including health and social care, transport, school closures etc.), and increasing the risk of falls and injuries.

Who are the ‘at risk’ groups in severe cold weather this winter?

- Older age, especially those who are 65 and over. Those who are vulnerable to cold, partly due to an underlying chronic illness, as well as those living on their own who are socially isolated
- People with a chronic and severe illness such as heart conditions, circulatory disease, asthma, depression and anxiety, diabetes and arthritis
- People with symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19
- People recovering from COVID-19
- Pregnant women and children under the age of five.
- Homeless people and rough sleepers
- People in households experiencing fuel poverty (i.e., those who have a low income but have high energy costs)
- People living in houses with mould or in deprived circumstances

How does cold weather impact healthcare services?

There is an increase in hospital admissions from cold-related illnesses, as the temperature falls. Hospitals and social care are commonly faced with winter pressures, often resulting from a high demand for beds and difficulties in discharging patients. This is also compounded by staff shortages due to illness.

For primary, community and social care providers, increased levels of illness can put a strain on local NHS services such as GPs and hospitals.

How will real-time mortality monitoring take place?

UKHSA's national surveillance teams will provide weekly routine reports of health impacts including [excess deaths](#) (COVID-19 and non-COVID-19), influenza, [norovirus](#) and [syndromic surveillance](#).

The wider impact of COVID-19 on the surveillance systems routinely used to monitor the health impact of cold weather adds complexity to the surveillance outputs making their interpretation difficult.

Publication stats

- The Cold Weather Plan for England was viewed/downloaded a total of 3872 times (1 September 2021 to 31 March 2022).
- The Keep Warm, Keep Well leaflet was viewed/downloaded 3,153 times (1 September 2021 to 31 March 2022).

6. Winter Programmes and Resources

Cold Weather Plan for England

The plan 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.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cold-weather-plan-cwp-for-england>

Cold Weather Plan for England: Making the case

Why long-term strategic planning for cold weather is essential.

<https://khub.net/documents/135939561/174099487/Cold+Weather+Plan+-+Making+the+Case.pdf/69c22c83-1b1f-cfb9-0e2d-8f603a7b426e?t=1635339855693>

Keep Warm Keep Well leaflet

Provides advice on staying warm over the winter and checking on neighbours and relatives who may be vulnerable during cold weather, in order to reduce illness and deaths. Materials will continue to be available online to help local organisations communicate with the public.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-warm-keep-well-leaflet-gives-advice-on-staying-healthy-in-cold-weather>

NHS Winter Health

The main NHS website provides reliable advice and guidance throughout the year on how to keep fit and well. It includes information on topics such as: keeping warm; the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning; the importance of eating well; and the symptoms of flu. The site also offers symptom checkers and details of all local health services

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/keep-warm-keep-well/>

NHS England will post information on their website each week for service professionals and users about the current volume of activity in response to the winter pressures, including regular data on A&E and ambulance activity.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/uec-sitrep/>

Met Office ‘Weather Ready’

This is an annual web-based campaign hosted by the Met Office and is a portal for government departments and their partners. The pages offer advice and links to a range of organisations to help individuals, families and communities prepare for winter. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/seasonal-advice/about-weatherready>

Cold Homes Toolkit

Citizens Advice and Cornwall Council have produced two toolkits, one for health professionals and another for local authorities providing information and guidance on how to tackle fuel poverty: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cold-homes-toolkit/>

E-learning on helping people living in cold homes

<https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/cold-homes/>

Stop norovirus spreading this winter

This downloadable poster for health professionals contains information about norovirus, how it's transmitted and advice how to prevent spreading the disease.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/322947/Stop_norovirus_spreading_this_winter_leaflet.pdf

Guidance, data and analysis on norovirus including information about symptoms, management and how to prevent spread is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/norovirus-guidance-data-and-analysis>

Simple Energy Advice line

For help with advice on energy bills and energy efficiency: 0800 444202

<https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/>

Specific advice and guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19)

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>