

Urgent advice for patients, staff and the public from region's NHS

With the extreme weather across the North East and North Cumbria, the region's NHS has urgent guidance for patients, staff and the public.

- Urgent and emergency care services across the region's hospitals are continuing to run as usual, however, please **only attend if absolutely necessary** as services are extremely busy.
- Call the free NHS 111 number if you need urgent medical help or advice – GP advice is available by dialling this number and may prevent an unnecessary visit to the practice.
- Different parts of the region are affected varyingly but the adverse weather is affecting the ability of some NHS staff to travel to their place of work. Accordingly, there has been disruption to some non-urgent hospital outpatient appointments and non-urgent operations / procedures - affected hospitals are making every effort to contact those patients as soon as possible and apologise for any inconvenience caused. Any patient who is unsure whether their appointment is going ahead should call the hospital to check.
- If patients are unable to attend their planned hospital appointments due to the severe weather, they are also being asked to call ahead using the number provided on your original appointment letter to let the hospital know.
- Some NHS staff have struggled to get to work due to the weather. Any staff who are not on duty but able to safely get to work are asked to get in touch with their line manager ASAP – your help and support is much appreciated.
- Community healthcare teams may struggle to reach people at home and patients may experience delays in visits from their healthcare professional –

please check on your relatives and neighbours to see that they are safe, warm and well and have enough food and medication.

- For children who are off school, please keep them safe and wrapped up warm. The 'NHS Child Health' app is free to download and offers advice and support if your child is poorly.

In addition, some GP practices are struggling to stay open and those affected will be contacting patients and re-arranging any routine appointments at the earliest convenience. If patients require urgent medical advice, and their GP practice is open, they will be assessed over the phone and a decision taken about the most appropriate service to access.

The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) is also experiencing pressures and is asking people to consider carefully whether they need to dial 999.

Paul Liversidge, Chief Operating Officer at North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) said: "As an emergency service, we don't stop for any weather and in the past 36 hours we have attended 1,286 incidents and answered 1,638 emergency 999 calls and 2,785 NHS111 calls.

"Our priority right now is the safety of our staff and patients travelling in adverse weather conditions. We are prioritising our resources to those patients who are critically ill – please bear with us if it takes us a little longer to access areas with heavier snow or traffic disruption.

"We have cancelled some scheduled patient transport bookings for patients with routine hospital appointments so that we can ensure our service for critically ill patients and hospital discharges is undisturbed."

The NHS is urging patients to choose which service they use wisely, and advises the elderly and vulnerable people to keep warm, both indoors and out, and to heat their homes to at least 18C.

NHS England's Medical Director for Cumbria and the North East, Professor Chris Gray, said: "Please take care of yourself and check that your neighbours are okay. Our advice is: if you don't need to go out, stay in, stay warm and stay well. If you have to go out, take extra care on slippery surfaces."

"Health advice is available by calling 111, on the NHS Choices website or from your local pharmacist or GP – please do get advice at the first sign of illness. Your local pharmacist is an excellent first point of call for advice and seeing them helps to take pressure off GPs and reduces non-emergency A&E visits."

"I want to say a huge thank you to all of our NHS staff across the region who are working so hard to deliver the best service they can at this very difficult time."

Cold weather can be very harmful to health and around 25,000 more people die over the course of each winter compared with other times of the year.

If you care for children, the [child health app](#) is free to download and offers a wealth of advice and support.

Notes to editors:

Interviews are available with **tbc**. **Contact:** NHS England media hub: Monday to Friday: 9am-5pm: 0113 825 3231; Out of hours: 07730 381690 Email: england.northmedia@nhs.net

Top tips to 'Stay Well' this winter:

Choose the right service: Use the [NHS Choices website](#) for health advice and information about where to go to get the right treatment.

See your local pharmacist – your pharmacist can advise on a wide range of common illnesses. If you start to feel unwell, even if it is just a cough or cold, get immediate help from your pharmacist before it becomes more serious.

Search nhs.uk/staywellpharmacy for more information and to help you find your nearest NHS pharmacy and opening hours.

If you need medical help fast, but it's not life-threatening or an emergency, call **NHS 111** at any time for advice.

Keep warm – both in and outdoors. Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F), if you can.

Get the flu jab - If you have a long term health condition or are over 65, cold weather can seriously endanger your health. Ask your GP or pharmacist for details.

Self-care: For many winter ailments such as coughs, colds and flu-like symptoms, people don't need to go to A&E or their local GP practice and are better off taking some paracetamol, drinking plenty of fluids and resting.

Stock up your medicine cabinet – make sure you have the essentials.

Avoid slips and trips: don't go out unless you have to; use footwear with slip-resistant soles.

If you care for children, the [child health app](#) is free to download and offers a wealth of advice and support.

The NHS advises elderly and people with long-term conditions to keep warm, both indoors and out, to heat their homes to at least 18C, and there is still time, as well as vaccine stocks, to get the flu jab to help avoid unnecessary hospital stays.

The **'Stay Well This Winter'** campaign is an initiative from Public Health England and [NHS England](#) to help the most vulnerable people prepare for winter and avoid having to visit hospital due to common winter illnesses.

The **'Plasticine People'** campaign (North of England Commissioning Support Unit) will run this winter to raise awareness and influence people's decisions about best use of health services, and change the use of urgent care services, across the North East and North Cumbria in order to improve patient flow.

Get your flu jab: Who can get the vaccination?

- People aged 65 and over.
- People with long term health conditions
- Health care workers
- Children aged two and three
- School children up to year four
- Children aged six months and above with some health conditions

Further information about the flu vaccination is available [here](#) and <https://vimeo.com/238061086> and on social media #jabdab