



Media release

16 November 2011

NHS gets ready for winter

A PLAN, produced by the local NHS on behalf of the Bedfordshire and Luton Local resilience Forum (BLLRF), has been launched to help support people to stay warm and healthy throughout the cold winter months.

The *Bedfordshire and Luton Cold Weather Plan* has been developed alongside the Department of Health's *Cold Weather Plan for England*. It provides guidance which the local NHS, social care and other organisations can incorporate into their winter planning arrangements and aims to prepare for, alert people to, and prevent the major avoidable effects of winter on people's health, which claim around 27,000 lives each year in England and Wales.

Some groups are particularly susceptible to the effects of very cold weather, such as older people, the very young and people with pre-existing medical conditions. However, it also includes people who cannot afford to adequately heat their homes or those living in a cold, damp home with poor or inadequate heating and insulation.

Every year mortality rises by 19 per cent in the winter months in England and Met Office figures show that December 2010 was the coldest December in the UK since 1910.

Muriel Scott, NHS Bedfordshire Director of Public Health, said: "Cold snaps can happen suddenly and rapid drops in temperature can quickly affect vulnerable people by increasing the risk of heart attacks, strokes, lung illnesses, influenza and other diseases and also serious injuries from slips and falls in the snow or ice.

"It is important that we are all prepared for winter before temperatures start to drop. By planning ahead we can offer care and support for people at risk in the event of a cold snap and help prevent them becoming unwell as a result."

The Cold Weather Plan is supported by a Met Office cold weather alert service, which includes four alert levels. The alerts are issued for either low temperatures or widespread ice or heavy snow and escalate depending on the severity, duration and spread of the weather conditions up to a major incident at level 4.

Muriel Scott added: "Although we are still enjoying relatively mild weather, now is the time to make winter weather preparations. There are many things we can do to keep ourselves and our families

warm, healthy and safe through the cold weather, as well as saving money. All this useful information can be found at www.direct.gov.uk”

Now is a good time to:

- Check that pipes are adequately lagged
- Make sure that your heating system is working safely and effectively
- Check that you have ordered your winter heating fuel
- Check that you know where your stop tap is located
- Find out if you are entitled to grants and subsidies for home heating and insulation
- Check you have had your flu jab if you are aged 65 or over, pregnant, have certain medical conditions, live in a residential or nursing home, or are the main carer for an older or disabled person

Note to editor

Living in poorly heated or insulated accommodation can worsen underlying health conditions and affect well-being:

- Mild hypothermia
- Cardiovascular disease
- Respiratory illness
- Falls and injuries
- Mental and social health

Some people are more at risk of becoming ill during cold weather. A number of factors can determine who is more vulnerable during winter:

- Older age – especially people who are over 75 years old.
- Young age – particularly children with respiratory problems, such as asthma.
- Chronic and severe illness – including heart conditions, respiratory insufficiency, asthma and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- Fuel poverty – over 75% of those who cannot afford to adequately heat their homes are single adult households.
- Inability to adapt –behaviour to keep warm – this affects people with disabilities, babies and the very young.
- Environment and overexposure – such as homelessness, or living in a cold, damp home with poor or inadequate heating and insulation.

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For further information please contact the NHS Bedfordshire press office on 01234 897208