

BETTER

NHS

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/staywell



**Your
health
matters**

**Help us
help you**

Samuel, Nurse

Stay well this winter

Winter conditions can be bad for our health, aggravating any existing health problems, increasing the risk of a fall, and making us more vulnerable to respiratory winter illnesses. 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 are at higher risk. Being cold can also cause your blood pressure to rise, potentially increasing the risk of strokes and heart attacks.

But there are lots of things you can do to stay well this winter.

Stay strong with winter vaccines

Getting vaccinated helps keep you and your loved ones safe by reducing your risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and passing an illness on to others. Every year thousands of older adults, people with certain health conditions and children under 5 need hospital care for flu, COVID-19, RSV and other preventable illnesses. Sadly every winter thousands of people die. The risk from these viruses is greater during winter when they circulate most as people spend more time indoors.



Clare,
Pharmacist

The NHS is offering flu and COVID-19 vaccines for free to those most at risk of getting seriously ill. As these viruses change and protection can decrease over time it's important to come forward every year if you are eligible to top up your protection even if you have had previous flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

You may be invited to get your free winter vaccines by the NHS but you do not have to wait before booking an appointment. If you are eligible, go ahead and book.

You can book both vaccines online at www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations or via the NHS app.

If you can't get online, you can call 119. 119 is also available by text relay on 18001 119 and the NHS 119 BSL interpreter service at www.signvideo.co.uk/nhs119

You can also book your flu vaccine at your GP practice or if you are over 18 you can find a pharmacy www.nhs.uk/flu-pharmacy. You can also get your COVID-19 vaccine by using the walk in finder to find a pharmacy offering the COVID-19 vaccine www.nhs.uk/covid-walk-in.

Residents in care homes for older adults will be offered vaccination in their care homes.

Who is eligible for which vaccines?

Anyone 65 and over, pregnant women and residents in care homes for older adults are eligible for both the COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. Those aged 6 months and over with certain long term health conditions may be eligible for one or both of these vaccines depending on their condition.

The flu vaccine is available free for carers of an older or disabled person, people that receive a carer's allowance and anyone living with someone with a weakened immune system. It is also offered to children aged 2-3 (on 31 August) through their GP practice and for school aged children from reception to year 11 through their school aged immunisation service (usually at school). School aged children can also get the flu vaccine at their GP practice if they have a long term health condition: www.nhs.uk/child-flu

Whilst flu and COVID-19 vaccines are needed every year, there are some vaccines that you only need to get once to help keep you protected. If you're aged 65 or over, or have certain health conditions, you are eligible for a one-off pneumococcal vaccine, which will help protect you from a major cause of pneumonia. This can be given at the same time as the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. Ask your GP practice.

If you are aged 70-79 or turned 65 on or after 1st September 2023, you can also get your shingles vaccine to reduce your chance of getting the disease, or experiencing complications, by contacting your GP practice.

Those who turned 75 on or after 1 September 2024 and those already aged 75 to 79 will also now be able to get the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine.

The RSV vaccine should ideally be given separately to the other vaccines above. RSV can be serious for older adults as it affects the airways and lungs and can lead to pneumonia and every year, thousands of older people are hospitalised. Your GP practice will contact you to offer an appointment.

A range of vaccinations including the RSV vaccine and whooping cough (pertussis) will also be offered if you are pregnant to protect you and your baby from serious illness.

More information is available here:

www.nhs.uk/pregnancyvaccinations

Find out more about NHS vaccinations at:

www.nhs.uk/vaccinations

How to avoid passing on flu and COVID-19 to others

To avoid passing on viruses that spread by sneezing, coughing and breathing:

- If you're unwell, stay home and avoid contact with people if you can, particularly staying away from vulnerable people like babies and people with long-term health conditions.
 - Let people who need to come into your home know if you have symptoms.
 - Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing, bin your tissue immediately, then wash your hands.
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- Consider wearing a mask if you have symptoms, are in close contact with someone who is high risk, or when you are in crowded or enclosed spaces. Open a window during their visit, if it's not too cold.
- Get all the vaccines for which you are eligible.

Treatments for COVID-19

The NHS offers treatments to people with COVID-19 who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously ill. For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/CovidTreatments

If you are eligible for COVID-19 treatments, keep rapid lateral flow tests at home, and take a test as soon as you have symptoms, even if they are mild. Tests are available free from participating pharmacies if you are eligible.

If your test is positive, call your GP practice, hospital specialist or NHS 111 as soon as possible. They'll decide if you need referring for an assessment for COVID-19 treatment. If your test result is negative, but you still have symptoms, continue to do a total of 3 rapid lateral flow tests over 3 days.

Keeping yourself and your home warm

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.

Age UK and UKHSA suggest heating your home to a temperature that is comfortable for you. This should be at least 18°C in the rooms that you regularly use such as your living room and bedroom. Low indoor temperatures can have a serious impact on your health, especially if you have medical conditions or are older.

With the rising cost of living, there are some simple changes that can help to keep you and your home warm:

- Try to reduce draughts – fit draught excluders around doors cheaply, or alternatively use an old towel to cover a gap under a door.
- Keep your bedroom windows closed at night.
- Wear several layers of thinner clothing – this will keep you warmer than one thicker layer.
- Ensure you are eating enough and having hot drinks.

Check that 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 and www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk for more information. If you live in rented or social accommodation, you can check that your landlord is meeting minimum standards around energy efficiency, damp and mould.

Check for safety concerns around your home

Age UK advises older people to make some simple changes around your home to make it a safer place. For example, moving rugs and mats at the top or the bottom of the stairs out of the way, installing a night light near the bed to make sure you can see where you're going if you wake up in the night, and removing trip hazards like trailing wires or clutter from your home.

Fire Safety

Most fires in the home start accidentally. Having working smoke alarms on every floor of your home can provide the vital early warning should a fire start. Smoke alarms should be tested monthly. Get a **carbon monoxide alarm** for each room of your home that contains appliances that burn gas, oil, coal or wood.

You can complete an online home fire safety check at www.ohfsc.co.uk. It will provide fire safety advice specific to you and tips on how to keep you and your household safe from fire.

Seeking financial support

Make sure you're receiving all the help you're entitled to this winter.

There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to help you make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help manage energy bills. If you're eligible for Pension Credit you could also get a Winter Fuel Payment. Check what benefits you could be eligible for at www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators

The government has also published energy saving tips to help save money on bills at helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk

For further advice on these support measures, visit Age UK's website or call 0800 169 6565.

Mental health support

We all feel down from time to time, no matter our age. You can find information and tips on keeping mentally healthy at www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters

Speak to your GP practice about NHS Talking Therapies if you are anxious, depressed or struggling to cope. They can help you – physically and mentally – and can refer you to the right service. You can also self-refer by visiting www.nhs.uk/talk

If you live with serious mental illness, you are entitled to a free NHS annual health check – talk to your GP, key worker or mental health service to book it.

If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, you can call NHS 111 and press Option 2 for 24-hour mental health advice and support. Information and contact details are available on www.nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth

Check your medicine cabinet

Ask your pharmacist what medicines should be in your cabinet to help you and your family this winter.

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

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 medicines to help give relief. For more information, speak to your local pharmacist; find yours at www.nhs.uk/find-a-pharmacy

Keep active

There's strong evidence that people who are inactive have an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, depression and dementia. Regular exercise can help improve your physical and 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.

There are many activities you could do at home to keep active. For tips and ideas on keeping active go to www.nhs.uk/keepactive or have a look at www.ageuk.org.uk/active



Liam, Physiotherapist

Hand washing

Cases of infectious illnesses can increase over winter, including highly contagious infections such as flu and norovirus, also called the 'winter vomiting bug'.

Washing your hands with soap and water is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself and others from catching these viruses and help reduce the pressures on healthcare services.

Hand washing is particularly important when you're visiting someone in hospital or another healthcare setting.

If you do not have immediate access to soap and water, then use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

Make sure to wash your hands for at least 40 seconds, and find out more about how to wash your hands most effectively at www.nhs.uk/handwashing

Jaza, Nurse



Prescriptions

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

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

You can order prescriptions via GP or pharmacy websites, by calling them, or via NHS-approved apps. Ask a friend, relative or volunteer to collect medicines for you.

A list of NHS-approved apps is here
www.nhs.uk/approvedproviders

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 older neighbours, friends and family members, may need extra help over the winter. Keep in touch with them, especially if they live alone.

Make sure they're stocked up with enough food supplies for a few days, in case cold, ice or snowy weather stop them from going 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. 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. By answering questions about their health problem they will be told what to do and where to go.



For further advice on how you can help, visit www.ageuk.org.uk or call 0800 169 6565.

Where to go for the right medical help



GP
Pharmacy

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



111

111.nhs.uk

If you need urgent medical help but you're not sure where to go, use 111 to get assessed and directed to the right place for you. Go online at 111.nhs.uk, call 111 or use the NHS App*



999

Call 999 or go to A&E in an emergency when someone is seriously ill or their life is at risk

* If you need help in other languages call 111 and ask for an interpreter. Also available via the NHS 111 BSL interpreter service at 111.nhs.uk text relay by calling 18001 111.

This leaflet is available in alternative formats at www.nhs.uk/staywell
Email england.campaigns@nhs.net for braille copies.