

Stroke

Find information on stroke, how to recognise signs and symptoms and how to get help.

Who is this page for?

This page is for members of the public with high level information about stroke, signposts to sources of further information and support, and outlines the Public Health Agency's role in stroke awareness and partnership working. It also signposts health care professionals to key guidance and resources.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a serious life- threatening medical condition that happens when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off and brain cells are damaged or die.

A stroke is a **medical emergency and urgent treatment is essential**. If a stroke is expected call 999 immediately for an ambulance.

For further information about stroke, visit [NI Direct](#) . You can also find information and a short video about stroke, if you visit the [Stroke Association's Stroke information and support](#) page.

Why is it important to know about stroke?

Stroke claims the lives of around 1,000 people each year in Northern Ireland. Stroke is a common cause of death and disability in Northern Ireland with approximately 2,800 new strokes here every year. While the majority of strokes occur in people over the age of 65, it can strike at any age, with 25% occurring in people under the age of 65.

In order to reduce your chances of having a stroke it is important to know the risks factors associated with having a stroke and take action to help prevent it happening.

You can reduce your risk of having a stroke by:

- knowing and managing your personal risk factors such as high blood pressure;
- diabetes, atrial fibrillation (irregular heart beat) and high blood cholesterol;
- exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy weight;
- reducing alcohol consumption;
- stopping smoking.

For more information on reducing your risk of stroke, visit [nidirect - Preventing a stroke](#).

Signs and symptoms of stroke

The signs of a stroke can come on suddenly, knowing the signs and symptoms and acting **FAST** can improve the chances of survival and reduce the level of disability that results from a stroke.

The FAST campaign raises public awareness of the signs and symptoms of stroke, and highlights actions to take if you think someone is having one, in an easy to remember way:

F - Face - Has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?

A - Arms - Can they raise both arms and keep them there?

S - Speech - Is their speech slurred?

T - Time - Time to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.

A stroke is a medical emergency that requires immediate medical attention, so recognising any sign of stroke and calling 999 for an ambulance is crucial. The sooner somebody who is having a stroke gets urgent medical attention, the better their chances of a good recovery.

Other possible symptoms

FAST symptoms identifies most strokes, but sometimes a stroke can cause other symptoms. These may include sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body, blurred vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes, difficulty speaking or finding words, memory loss or confusion, dizziness or falling over, a severe headache, or feeling or being sick.

There may also be other causes for these symptoms.

Further information and support

Access direct information about:

- [treating a stroke](#),
- [recovering from a stroke](#) and
- [stroke in children](#) on [Strokes | nidirect page](#).

Other resources:

- [nidirect – Stroke information](#)
- [Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke](#)
- [Stroke Association](#)

How does the PHA support this work?

The Department of Health leads the implementation of the [Reshaping Stroke Care Action Plan](#), with the Public Health Agency contributing as a supporting partner alongside other Health and Social Care Organisations.

The Public Health Agency is represented on the [Northern Ireland Stroke Network](#) and works collaboratively with network members to support the development and improvement of stroke services across Northern Ireland in line with national policy, standards and guidance.

Key PHA campaigns

The Public Health Agency promotes FAST stroke awareness messaging to help people recognise the main signs of stroke and reinforce the need to seek urgent medical help.

- [Stroke campaign leaflet and poster](#)
- [Think FAST if you suspect a stroke](#)

Key resources for professionals

- National Institute for Health and care Excellence (NICE) – [Stroke and transient ischaemic \(TIA\) attack in over 16s](#) – provides the best clinical advice on the diagnosis and acute management of stroke and TIA in the 48 hours after onset of

symptoms.

- [National Clinical guideline for Stroke for the UK and Ireland](#)- provides evidence based guidance on the organisation and delivery of safe, high quality stroke care for adults, from acute care through to rehabilitation.
- [Department of Health – Stroke Action Plan](#) – sets out priorities and actions for the development and improvement of stroke services in Northern Ireland.
- [Getting IT Right First Time](#) (GIRFT)- [Stroke](#)- provides recommendations to support improvement in the organisation and delivery of stroke services.

Last reviewed

05 October 2026