



# STAY WELL THIS WINTER



Northern Health  
and Social Care Trust

Winter conditions can be seriously bad for our health, especially for people with long-term conditions such as COPD, bronchitis, emphysema, asthma, diabetes or heart or kidney disease. People aged 65 or older are also vulnerable.

The cold, damp weather, ice, snow and high winds can all aggravate any existing health problems and make us more vulnerable to respiratory winter illnesses.

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

### Symptoms of winter illnesses

You can check your symptoms and find out more about a range of conditions by searching online for 'indirect health conditions A-Z'

Here are a few guidelines to help you judge how long some common illnesses and symptoms should last for:

Common illnesses	Most people are better by
Earache (middle ear infection)	8 days
Sore throat	7– 8 days
Sinusitis (adults only)	14 – 21 days
Cold	14 days
Cough or bronchitis	21 days

### Self-care

Self-care is the best choice to treat minor illnesses, ailments and injuries. Common winter illnesses like those in the table can be treated with over-the-counter medicines.

Remember, whether treated or not, most of these will get better.



To manage winter illness symptoms at home:

- rest;
- drink plenty of fluids;
- have at least one hot meal a day to keep your energy levels up;
- use over-the-counter medications to help give relief.

## Get advice from your nearest pharmacist

Your local pharmacist can provide confidential, expert advice and treatment for a range of common illnesses and complaints, without you having to wait for a GP appointment or going to your emergency department.

This can be the best and quickest way to help you recover and get back to normal.

If you can't get to a pharmacist yourself, ask someone to go for you or call your local pharmacy.

You can find details of which pharmacies are open in your local area when others are closed by searching online for 'HSC pharmacy rota'.



## Prescription medicines

Make sure you get your prescription medicines before your pharmacy or GP practice closes for Christmas. If you've been prescribed antibiotics or

any other medication, make sure you take them as directed.

Remember if you're feeling unwell antibiotics may not help, and taking antibiotics when they are not appropriate puts you and your family at risk. Take your doctor's advice. To find out more search online for 'nhs antibiotics'.

## Make sure you get your flu jab

The flu virus strikes in winter and it can be far more serious than you think. Flu can lead to serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and it can be deadly.

That's why the flu jab is free if you're aged 65 or over, or if you have a long-term health condition.

If you have young children or grandchildren they may also be eligible for a free flu vaccination.

If you are the main carer of an older or disabled person you may also be eligible for the free flu jab. You can find out more about flu by searching online for 'nidirect flu'.

Don't forget that if you're aged 65 or over, you are eligible for the pneumococcal vaccine, which will help protect you from pneumococcal diseases such as pneumonia.

## Keep warm

It is important to keep warm in winter – both inside and outdoors. 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. Heat your home to at least 18°C (65°F). You might prefer your main living room to be slightly warmer. Keep your bedroom window closed on winter nights. Breathing cold air can be bad for your health as it increases the risk of chest infections.

Wear several layers of light clothes. Several layers trap warm air better than one bulky layer.

You can find out more by searching online for 'nidirect keep warm'.



## Look out for other people

Remember that other people, such as older neighbours, friends and family members, may need a bit of extra help over the winter.

Icy pavements and roads can be very slippery and cold weather can stop people from getting out and about. Keep in touch with your friends, neighbours and family and ask if they need any practical help, or if they're feeling under the weather.



If they need help when the GP practice or pharmacy is closed, you can contact their local GP out of hours service, see the details overleaf.

**You should always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.**

## Mental health

It is important to look after your mental health as well as your physical health. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties, talk to your GP or find out more by searching online for 'nidirect mental health'. If you or someone you know is in distress or despair call Lifeline on 0800 808 8000.

## Symptoms of serious illness

These symptoms are possible signs of serious illness and should be assessed by a health professional urgently:

1. If your skin is very cold or has a strange colour, or you develop an unusual rash.
2. If you feel confused or have slurred speech or are very drowsy.
3. If you have difficulty breathing. Signs can include:
  - breathing quickly;
  - turning blue around the lips and the skin below the mouth;
  - skin between or above the ribs getting sucked or pulled in with every breath.
4. If you develop a severe headache and are sick.
5. If you develop chest pain.
6. If you have difficulty swallowing or are drooling.
7. If you cough up blood.
8. If you are feeling a lot worse.

If you or your child has any of these symptoms, are getting worse or are sicker than you would expect (even if your/their temperature falls), trust your instincts and seek medical advice urgently.

If a child under the age of 5 has any of symptoms 1–3, go to the Emergency Department immediately or call 999.



## Important contacts

### Your pharmacy

You can find details of pharmacy rotas in your local area by searching online for 'HSC pharmacy rota'.

### Your GP

GPs provide a range of services including medical advice, examinations, prescriptions and ongoing care for more longstanding or chronic conditions. You can find a list of GP Practices by searching online for 'nidirect gp practices'.

### GP out of hours

GP out of hours is for urgent medical care when your GP surgery is closed. GP out of hours services operate from 6pm each weekday evening until 7.30am the next morning and 24 hours on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. GP out of hours is an appointment only service. GP out of hours is an appointment only service. **Remember to telephone the service first.** The doctor or nurse will give you advice over the telephone, decide if you need to be seen by a doctor or will refer you to another service if required.

Call **Dalriada Urgent Care** on 028 2566 3500.

If you need to be seen by a GP you will be given an appointment to attend an out of hours centre in Ballymena, Coleraine, Magherafelt or Whiteabbey.



### Minor Injuries Unit

A Minor Injuries Unit can treat injuries that are not critical or life threatening, such as:

- injuries to upper and lower limbs;
- broken bones, sprains, bruises and wounds;
- bites – human, animal and insect;
- burns and scalds;
- abscesses and wound infections;
- minor head injuries;
- broken noses and nosebleeds;
- foreign bodies in the eyes and nose.

You can find a list by searching online for 'nidirect minor injuries'.

If you or a child over five years old suffers a minor injury, you can go to the Minor Injuries Unit at **Mid-Ulster Hospital**. Minor Injuries in patients of all ages are also treated at both **Antrim Area** and **Causeway Hospitals**.

The Minor Injuries Units for the Northern HSC Trust Area are:

### **Mid-Ulster Hospital**

59 Hospital Road,  
Magherafelt  
BT45 5EX  
Telephone: 028 7936 6720  
Open 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday.

**Closed public holidays.**

### **Antrim Area Hospital**

Bush Road  
Antrim  
BT41 2RL  
Telephone: 028 9442 4000  
Open 24 hours.

### **Causeway Hospital**

4 Newbridge Road  
Coleraine  
BT52 1HS  
Telephone: 028 7032 7032  
Open 24 hours.

## **Emergency Department**

Emergency Departments provide the highest level of emergency care for patients, especially those with sudden and acute illness or severe trauma. It is not appropriate to go to an Emergency Department as an alternative to your GP.

You can find details of your local Emergency Department by searching online for 'nirect emergency healthcare'.

In the Northern HSC Trust area there are Emergency Departments in both the **Antrim Area** and **Causeway Hospitals** (see above).

**You should always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.**





**Public Health Agency**

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)



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