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**To** SHA CEs, PCT CEs, LA CEs  
**Copied to** see attached list

**Re: NHS COLD WEATHER PLAN FOR ENGLAND – 2011/2012**  
*Protecting Health and Reducing Harm from Severe Cold*

This letter confirms the publication of the first national Cold Weather Plan (CWP) for England. This was referenced recently in Deputy NHS Chief Executive David Flory's September letter about Winter Preparedness and Planning. The CWP sets out the arrangements that will apply, and the actions that can be taken in advance of, and during, a spell of severe cold weather. The Plan can be accessed at [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_130564](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_130564)

Severe cold weather is a major public health challenge in this country. The effect of cold weather on health is one of the most significant, yet least recognised, factors causing death and illness in the country.

The CWP sets out a series of clear actions to be taken by the NHS, social care and other public agencies; professionals working with vulnerable people as well as by individuals and local communities to minimise the effects of severe cold weather on health.

The CWP will feel familiar to those associated with the national Heatwave Plan, which has been in existence for seven years. The CWP was also piloted over the last winter in certain parts of England.

The CWP is based on a severe cold warning system 'Cold Watch' which has been developed with the Met Office to alert key stakeholders to the likelihood of severe cold weather in different parts of the country so they can take appropriate action.

The purpose of the CWP is to enhance resilience in the event of severe cold weather. It is an important component of overall winter and emergency planning, as noted in David Flory's recent letter, and wider health promotion activity. It is being supported by a major new initiative, the Warm Homes, Healthy People fund with an aim to support Local Authorities and local partners to reduce death and morbidity in England

due to cold housing in the coming winter with further details to be announced in November 2011.

### **Why is cold weather an important health issue?**

On average, 27,000 additional people die in England over the winter months because of cold weather when compared with other times of the year.

The death rate in England is far higher than that in comparable countries. With better preparation for cold weather, thousands of lives could be saved each year. It is also estimated that cold weather costs the NHS over £850 million, as a result of treating disease due to cold private housing.

The CWP focuses on the effects of cold weather on health. However, severe cold weather in winter is often accompanied by ice and snow, which can cause severe disruption to services and access to these services for patients, staff and the wider public. At a local level, the key will be to ensure that cold weather health planning is co-ordinated with other winter pressures planning – for example, to maintain transport and other infrastructure.

### **The aims of the Cold Weather Plan (CWP):**

- To reduce winter mortality - reduce the yearly excess winter deaths, reduce disease and increase well-being through appropriate preparation and response to severe cold weather alerts. The CWP aims to raise public and professional awareness and trigger actions by those in contact with people known to be vulnerable to cold related illness and death. The CWP is primarily aimed at organisations, institutions and individuals who will interact with the most vulnerable in winter such as people with certain chronic health problems. It is also intended to mobilise civil society to help their neighbours, friends, relatives and themselves to protect against avoidable harm to health in winter.
- To reduce health system pressures - a secondary positive outcome is the potential for reduced pressures on the health and social care system during the busiest months of the year, through better anticipatory actions with vulnerable people.

The CWP draws attention to the dangers of cold weather to health and identifies a specific series of actions which can be taken in the preparations for winter and the response to a winter emergency. Our priority is to ensure that NHS and local authority public health and emergency planners take actions to reduce the impact of cold weather on health and to bring these actions into wider winter planning arrangements which already exist in all areas. Wider multi-agency Local Resilience Fora and emerging Health and Wellbeing Boards would also have a critical role in supporting the delivery of this Plan at a local level.

The CWP is also for local and voluntary groups and organisations, which play an important part in raising awareness and supporting vulnerable people in their homes during severe cold weather, ice and snow.

### **What does it include?**

The CWP is supported by the Met Office's Cold Weather Alert Service. This is operated by the Met Office between **1<sup>st</sup> November and 31<sup>st</sup> March** and is divided into 4 levels depending on the risk of severe winter weather.

Each level provides recommended action and advice for: health and care services, the voluntary sector and individuals and families.

- We are also publishing today a separate volume of supporting information: **Making the Case: why public health cold weather planning is essential to health and well-being**, which gives an introduction to the basic science and facts and figures showing why cold weather can be deleterious to health.

The CWP is also being supported by the *Keep Warm Keep Well* information resources: these provide advice on staying warm over the winter and staying in touch with people who may be vulnerable during cold weather, including the elderly, in order to reduce illness and deaths. Adverts will run on local radio stations and a leaflet will be available to download at

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/winterhealth/Pages/KeepWarmKeepWell.aspx>

### **SHA clusters, Local Authorities and PCT clusters are asked to:**

- take appropriate action to ensure the effective communication and dissemination of the CWP to key professional staff, organisations and local voluntary and community groups for implementation
- ensure that the core elements of winter planning are being managed locally. The key elements include:
  - long term strategic planning and winter preparedness
  - advance warning and advice during the winter months
  - communicating with the public
  - communicating with service providers
  - engaging the community
- ensure that the CWP is brought to the attention of all emerging Health and Wellbeing Boards or other appropriate local strategic health fora currently in operation; emerging clinical commissioning groups; and local resilience fora already in operation for implementation
- support primary and social care teams and emerging clinical commissioning groups in:
  - familiarising themselves with the CWP, and their roles in implementing it; and

- identifying individuals at particular risk, and taking steps as set out in the CWP to reduce it - this will involve collaboration with the voluntary sector and the Independent Care Home sector
- ensure independent care homes and hospitals and community nursing agencies are made aware of the Plan
- ensure NHS Trusts, including Mental Health Trusts, have assessed their ability to maintain ambient room temperatures at appropriate levels both day and night
- work with local authority housing and planning teams, and providers of social housing, to take account of long-term measures to reduce the impact of severe cold weather – especially working with health and social care partners who may be able to identify vulnerable clients and patients at risk from poorly heated and cold housing
- ensure that cold weather planning forms an integral part of wider multi-agency winter and emergency plans and procedures, and that those involved in their implementation, including Local Resilience Forums, are made familiar with it

A summary of key amendments and web-links to materials will be advertised via emergency planning routes and professional bulletins. However, you and copy recipients of this letter are asked to discuss the CWP, with those organisations and teams that need to start taking action as part of your overall winter preparedness work.

The effectiveness of the CWP will be reviewed in 2012 with a view to making improvements for future years. The evaluation process will include data monitoring, expert reviews, research, cross-departmental discussions and stakeholder engagement.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally C Davies', is written in a cursive style.

**PROFESSOR DAME SALLY C DAVIES  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER  
CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER**

**Copied to:**

Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat

Care associations

- Carers UK
- ECCA
- National Care Association
- Registered Nursing Homes Association
- UK Care Home Care Association

CQC CE

DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division

Directors of Adult Social Services

Directors of Children Social Services

Directors of Housing

Directors of Planning

GPs

Health Watch/CQC

HPA CE

NHS Trust CEs

Monitor

NHS Foundation Trusts CEs

NHS Regional Directors of Public Health

NHS Trust Medical Directors

PCT DPHs

PCT lead nurses

PCT Medical Directors

Professional bodies

- Community and District Nurses Association
- CPHVA
- RCGP
- RCN
- RCP
- RPSGB