



# Guidance on community action during severe weather

The Big Society in action

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Every year public-spirited volunteers get out in their communities and support people who are affected by severe weather conditions. Whether shovelling the snow away from schools or transporting food and medicine to the vulnerable, these volunteers step up for neighbours in trouble. This is the community spirit that lies at the heart of the Big Society and the Government is keen that no would-be volunteer is discouraged or barred from helping out. This guidance is for all those individuals, and voluntary groups, who want to get involved this year.

The guidance challenges misconceptions about health and safety laws getting in the way of action and volunteering. It also contains contacts for useful charities for vulnerable people such as the Red Cross, and tips on how to volunteer. We need the Big Society most in times of adversity when communities have to pull together. This guidance sets out how you can survive the ice and snow and help your neighbours to do the same.

If you are stuck at home due to the snow ask your boss if you can use the day to volunteer locally. Skills such plumbing and tree surgery are very valuable.

## Remember:

**You do not need a Criminal Records Bureau check to call round and check on elderly friends and neighbours.**

**You can help clear paths and pavements to prevent slips and falls – don't believe the myths about being sued.**

## Older people

During severe weather older people are especially prone to hypothermia and pneumonia. The Red Cross says that unfortunately they are also the most likely to be living in older houses without adequate heating. In the cold weather it's even more important to support older people, so call in regularly on elderly friends, neighbours and relatives to see if they need help staying warm or with getting provisions.

You could try helping older people by letting them know about AgeUK's well being advice. AgeUK says that in the cold weather it's even more important to eat at least one hot meal a day and have hot drinks throughout the day. Include a good range of foods in the diet and aim for five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Remember frozen vegetables are as good as fresh. Having a hot drink before bed and taking a flask to bed are good ideas too. It is also important to keep moving – so try to sit still for no more than an hour.

**Anyone concerned about older neighbours can call the AgeUK helpline 0800 169 6565 or visit their website for more information**

**[www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/)**

## Neighbours

Neighbourhood Watch members are asked to be even more vigilant during severe weather, and to keep an eye out for people who may be vulnerable and need help from their neighbours. For further advice visit the Neighbourhood Watch website [www.mynhw.co.uk/](http://www.mynhw.co.uk/) **or email [enquiries@nationalhw.org](mailto:enquiries@nationalhw.org)**

## Homeless people

Homelessness is a year-round problem and Homeless Link, the national umbrella body for the sector, says that charities providing services for homeless people welcome the contribution that volunteers can make. If you are interested in volunteering in this sector contact your local homelessness charities, which you can find by searching the **Homeless Link website** <http://www.homeless.org.uk>

If you have concerns about homeless people you have seen sleeping outside in the cold weather, in the first instance you should contact your local authority who will alert the necessary services. Most local authorities have out of hours numbers for this sort of thing, but if not, and you are really concerned about someone out of working hours, call the police who should be able to contact local services, including an outreach team in your area. Alternatively if you know of local homelessness charities you could contact them direct as they will know what local services are available. Information on Cold Weather Provision can be found on the Homeless Link website. Information about winter shelters in London is available on the Homeless London website:

[www.homelesslondon.org/](http://www.homelesslondon.org/) click on the Winter Shelters headline). For outside London information about Outreach Teams can be found on [www.homeless.org.uk/cold-weather-provision](http://www.homeless.org.uk/cold-weather-provision) and follow the link under “Outside London”.

In London, Thames Reach London Street Rescue helps rough sleepers off the streets and into accommodation. If you are concerned about someone sleeping rough, you can call 0870 383 3333 or use the online referral form – [www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/on-the-street/get-help](http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/on-the-street/get-help)

## Local authorities

Your local authority web site will contain helpful information on what is happening in your local area from emergency contact numbers and services for the vulnerable to gritting operations. Most will also contain information and contact details for local voluntary groups.

You can read tips on clearing snow and ice from pavements yourself on the Directgov website:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG\\_191868](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_191868)

You can also find out how services in you area are affected by going to Directgov and searching by local authority

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

## 4x4 drivers

4x4 drivers can consider joining one of the response groups located across the country. These offer a variety of services to local authorities, emergency services and other volunteer agencies. In the main, this is providing reliable transport in times of severe weather (snow, gales, heavy rain and floods) and other major emergencies. This can be to transport essential personnel or supplies to areas that would be hard or impossible to reach in normal vehicles and/or in support of local authorities' rest centres. Across the country there are at least 26 response groups. If you are interested in finding out more contact <http://www.4x4response.info>

## Faith groups

Faith groups regularly provide help to people in need, such as the homeless, throughout the year. During periods of particularly cold weather, individual places of worship such as churches and Sikh gurdwaras, may be able to provide free hot meals. The Salvation Army, along with its many local volunteers, provides extensive support such as hot food and shelter in emergencies.

[http://www2.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www\\_uki.nsf](http://www2.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki.nsf) Salvation Army  
[www.bahai.org.uk/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/) or 020 7584 2566 - Bahá'í Community of UK  
<http://www.boardofdeputies.org.uk/> or 020 7543 5400 - Board of Deputies of British Jews  
<http://www.minab.org.uk> or 020 8993 7141- MINAB (Mosque and Imam National Advisory Council)  
[www.churches-together.net](http://www.churches-together.net) - Churches Together in Britain and Ireland  
<http://www.hinduforum.org> or 020 8965 0671 Hindu Forum of Britain  
<http://jaincentre.com> or 0116 254 1150 - Jain Samaj Europe  
email: [jasdev@bscf.org](mailto:jasdev@bscf.org) - British Sikh Consultative Forum  
<http://www.nbo.org.uk/> or 0845 345 8978 - Network of Buddhist Organisations, UK  
<http://www.ztfe.com> or 020 8866 0765 - Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

## Volunteering

Volunteering does not have to be related to emergencies only. There are thousands of opportunities to make a difference in your community all year round. Organisations such as the umbrella organisation for volunteering in the UK, **Volunteering England**, are well equipped to identify opportunities across the country.

Volunteering England has a number of ways to get involved. If you are interested in making a difference in your community, contact them at

[www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk) Get started by thinking of an organisation that has helped you, and help them. Call your children's school, your health centre or a charity and see if they need a hand.

The location and contact details for the nearest office can be found at <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/IWantToVolunteer> or call **Volunteering England on 0207 520 8900**.

Other organisations which can help you get involve are Do-it, Volunteering made easy, at <http://www.do-it.org.uk> TimeBack at [www.timeback.org.uk](http://www.timeback.org.uk)

## Out and about in the cold

The Red Cross advises that you stop and offer roadside assistance if you see someone's car has broken down during severe weather. This is a very small act of volunteering which could save someone's life. But in areas where heavy snow is likely to fall, be prepared.

### **Always carry in your car:**

- a blanket
- a torch
- a mobile phone
- a brightly-coloured headscarf
- matches
- some chocolate bars
- a flask of hot soup
- a sign that says HELP in big bright letters.

If you break down or get stuck in snow, don't leave your car – it will get noticed before you will. Put the HELP sign in your window, tie the headscarf to your car's aerial, turn off the engine and curl up in the blanket. Don't run your car's engine for more than a few minutes at a time and make sure its exhaust isn't blocked with snow.

When the severe weather has passed, remember that it catches many people unaware every year in the UK, so always be prepared to keep safe and to help others.

If you are interested in doing more go to the Red Cross website <http://www.redcross.org.uk> where advice can be found on what to do in cases of hypothermia, frostbite and falls and tumbles.

## Cold-related health issues

### Hypothermia

This condition is caused by prolonged exposure to the cold. Although the risk of hypothermia is greater outdoors, it can also develop indoors in poorly heated homes. Older people, infants and those who are thin and frail are particularly vulnerable. Again, if you know about people who may be vulnerable to hypothermia, keep an eye out for them. If you spot someone who may be suffering from hypothermia you should call an ambulance and do the following which can be found on the Red Cross website <http://www.redcross.org.uk>

1. The casualty should be warmed slowly. Cover the person with blankets – and a hat if possible. Warm the room.
2. Give the casualty a warm drink and/or high energy foods, such as chocolate.
3. Remember, in older people, hypothermia may also be disguising the symptoms of a stroke or heart attack.
4. Monitor the person's vital signs – breathing, temperature and response levels – while waiting for an ambulance.

### Treatment for hypothermia when outdoors

- Take the casualty to a sheltered place as soon as possible. Shield them from the wind.
- Remove and replace any wet clothing if possible; do not give the casualty your clothes. Make sure their head is covered.
- Protect the casualty from the ground. Lay them on a thick layer of insulating material, such as pine branches, heather or bracken. Put the casualty in a dry sleeping bag and/or cover with blankets or newspapers. Wrap them in a plastic or foil survival bag, if available. You can also shelter and warm the person with your body.
- Ideally, two people should go for help and stay together if you are in a remote area. It is important that you do not leave the casualty alone – someone must remain with them at all times.
- To help re-warm a casualty who is conscious, give them warm drinks and high-energy foods such as chocolate, if available.
- The casualty must be re-warmed gradually. Monitor and record their vital signs – level of response, breathing, pulse and temperature while waiting for help to arrive. When help arrives, the casualty should be taken to hospital by stretcher.

## Frostbite

This condition usually occurs in freezing or cold and windy conditions. People who cannot move around to increase their circulation are particularly susceptible. In many cases, frostbite is accompanied by hypothermia and should be treated accordingly.

### How to treat frostbite

- Advise the casualty to put their hands in their armpits. Move the casualty into the warm before you thaw the affected part further.
- Once inside, gently remove gloves, rings and any other constrictions, such as boots. Warm the affected part with your hands, in your lap or continue to warm them in the casualty's armpits. Avoid rubbing the affected area because this can damage skin and other tissues.
- Place the affected parts in warm water at around 40°C (104°F). Dry carefully, and apply a light dressing of dry gauze bandage. Monitor and record the casualty's vital signs – level of response, breathing, pulse and temperature while waiting for help to arrive. Give them a warm drink such as soup and/or high-energy foods such as chocolate to help warm them up.
- Raise the affected limb to reduce swelling. An adult may take the recommended dose of paracetamol or their own painkillers. A child may have the recommended dose of paracetamol syrup (not aspirin). Take or send the casualty to hospital.

## Falls and tumbles

Slippery and icy conditions make it much more likely that people will stumble and fall, possibly damaging their ligaments, muscles and tendons. It's often difficult to distinguish between muscle, joint and bone injuries – so if you suspect the injury may be more serious, seek immediate medical help. The initial treatment for both injuries is the same – the **RICE** procedure:

- R**est the injured part
- I**ce – apply ice or a cold pad to the injured area
- C**omfortably support the injury using a bandage or soft padding
- E**levate the injured part

NHS Direct is also a good source of health advice.

The preparing for emergencies section on the Directgov website has information on how you can become better prepared to deal with emergencies.

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Preparingforemergencies/index.htm>