



Volunteering and neighbourliness

Helping out in severe weather

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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 getting provisions.

Age Concern/Help the Aged say that in the cold weather it's even more important to eat at least one hot meal and have hot drinks during the day. Include a good range of foods in your 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. **Anyone concerned about older neighbours can call the Age Concern helpline 0800 00 99 66. www.ageconcern.org.uk**

Neighbours

Neighbourhood Watch members are being asked to be even more vigilant in this period of 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 or call **0116 222 2222 extension 3871 or email nhwn.1@btinternet.com**

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: www.homeless.org.uk or call 020 7840 4430**

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

any local homelessness charities you could contact them direct as they will know what local services are available.

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 a blanket in your car

Also, carry:

- a torch
- a brightly-coloured headscarf
- matches
- some chocolate bars
- a flask of hot soup
- a mobile phone
- 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 www.redcross.org.uk where more advice can be found on what to do in cases of hypothermia, frostbite and falls and tumbles, **or call their volunteer line on 0845 054 7111**

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. Principally 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 21 response groups. If you are interested in finding out more contact www.4x4response.info

Volunteering England

The umbrella organisation for volunteering in the UK 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

For the current cold weather they say:

- Call round to check on elderly friends and neighbours. You do not need a Criminal Records Bureau check.
- Help clear pavements to prevent slips and falls – don't believe the myths about being sued.
- Think 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.
- Stuck at home due to the snow? Ask your boss if you can use the day to volunteer locally.
- Plumber? Tree surgeon? First-aider? Your skills are really valuable – why not offer to help.
- Be alert – help keep people off frozen streams and ponds.

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 and organisations such as Volunteering England are well equipped to identify opportunities across the country. The location and contact details for the nearest office can be found at www.volunteering.org.uk/IWantToVolunteer or call **Volunteering England on 0845 305 6979.**

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 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

1. Take the casualty to a sheltered place as quickly as possible. Shield them from the wind.
2. Remove and replace any wet clothing if possible; do not give the casualty your clothes. Make sure their head is covered.
3. Protect the casualty from the ground. Lay them on a thick layer of dry 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.
4. 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
5. To help re-warm a casualty who is conscious, give them warm drinks and high-energy foods such as chocolate, if available.
6. 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 warmth 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:

Rest the injured part

Ice – apply ice or a cold pad to the injured area

Comfortably support the injury using a bandage or soft padding

Elevate the injured part

NHS Direct is also a good source of prompt health advice.

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

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<http://direct.gov.uk/preparingforemergencies>