

Cold homes and health

Keep yourself warm and well

Cold homes are bad for health. If you're struggling to pay your bills and are under-heating your home, there's a risk that your health may suffer.

Problems and diseases linked to the cold range from blood pressure increases and common colds, to heart attacks and pneumonia.

Besides poor health, cold-related illness causes absence from work, social isolation, and sleep deprivation. It may lead to mental or stress related illness, with negative knock on effects for family and friends.

Who's affected?

Those with existing health conditions are especially vulnerable to the cold. This includes physical conditions, such as circulatory problems, diabetes and arthritis; and mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety.

Respiratory conditions, like asthma, can be exacerbated by the cold, even more so if there are damp and mould issues in living spaces. This is often the case in under-heated, poorly ventilated homes.

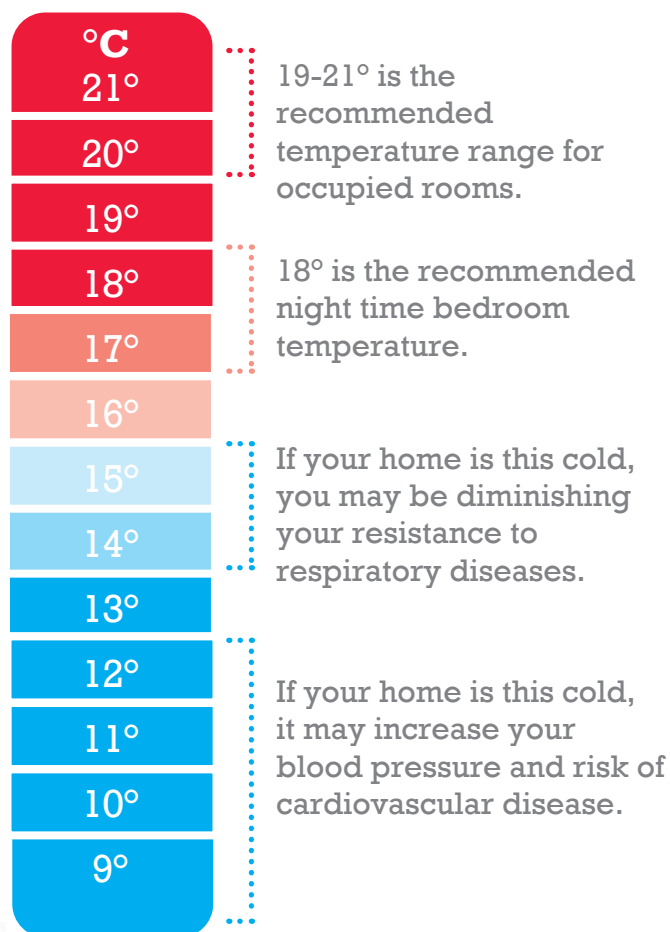
People with certain disabilities, children and the elderly also fall into higher risk categories.



How cold is too cold?

If you have a central heating system, you may also have a room thermostat to monitor and control the temperature in your home – it sends a signal to the boiler telling it to switch off when the house is warm enough. It's usually found in a hallway or sitting room.

Some modern heating controls now combine a heating timer and the thermostat, allowing you to set different temperatures for different times of the day.



Tips for cold weather

- 1) Set your heating to come on just before you get up and switch off just before you go to bed. If it's very cold, set it to stay on longer, rather than turning the thermostat up.
- 2) Close the curtains when it's getting dark. Tuck them behind the radiator and shut the doors to rooms you use most to keep the heat in.
- 3) Stay warm with a hot water bottle or electric blanket – but don't use both at the same time.
- 4) Off mains gas or electricity? Keep a sufficient fuel supply to avoid running out in winter. Consider joining an oil club to save money.
- 5) Have regular hot drinks and eat at least one hot meal a day if possible. Eating regularly helps keep energy levels up during winter.



Cold weather benefits

If you receive any type of benefit or are on a low income, you may be entitled to the following:

The **Warm Home Discount** is a £140 rebate on the household electricity bill. If you don't receive it automatically, you will need to apply through your electricity supplier.

A **Winter Fuel Payment** of £100-£300 is available for those aged over 65 on the qualifying date (usually in April). You should receive this automatically from the government, but you can call the helpline to confirm (0800 731 0160).

Cold Weather Payments are made when the temperature where you live is an average of 0°C or below over seven consecutive days. It is based on the benefits you receive, and will also be paid automatically.

Condensation, damp & mould

Some damp is caused by condensation. This can lead to mould growth that appears as a cloud of little black dots.

Condensation occurs when moist air comes into contact with a colder surface like a wall, window or mirror. The air can't hold the moisture and tiny drops of water appear. It also occurs in places the air is still, like the corners of rooms, behind furniture or inside wardrobes.

Reduce moisture by...

- Keeping lids on saucepans when cooking.
- Drying clothes in the fresh air, not on the radiator.
- Venting your tumble dryer to the outside.
- Avoiding paraffin heaters or flue-less bottled gas heaters – these produce a lot of moisture.

Let moist air out and fresh air in

- Extractor fans are an effective way to get rid of moist air and steam so less condensation forms.
- When you're cooking or having a bath, keep the kitchen or bathroom door shut and open the window to let the steam out.
- Let fresh air circulate to avoid mould forming. Make sure there is a gap between furniture and walls and give wardrobes and cupboards an airing sometimes.

Warm your home

- Very cold rooms are more likely to get damp and mouldy. Turn radiators onto their lowest setting. If you don't have central heating, consider using a room heater with a timer and temperature control.
- Insulate and draught-proof your home. Loft insulation, cavity wall insulation (if your house has them) and draught-proofing on windows and doors are good places to start.



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The Centre for Sustainable Energy is a national charity that helps people change the way they think and act on energy.

Our Home Energy Team offers free advice on domestic energy use to householders in Bristol, Somerset, Wiltshire, South Gloucestershire and Dorset.



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