UK EMERGENCY GUIDE

Extreme cold, snow & heating failure

UK homes can lose heat quickly when the boiler, heat pump or power fails in a cold snap. The priority is to keep people warm and well, avoid carbon monoxide, and only travel if you must. Hypothermia is a medical emergency — call 999 if you think someone has it.

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

01 Try to keep the rooms you use at 18°C or above, wear several thin layers, close curtains and doors, and gather the household in one room if you cannot heat the whole home.

02 Never use barbecues, camping stoves or petrol generators indoors, and never use a gas cooker or oven to heat a room. Fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm to BS EN 50291.

03 If heating fails, contact your supplier or landlord. If someone is shivering, pale, confused or unusually sleepy, call 999 — do not use a hot bath or hot water bottle to warm them.

LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY

999

Hypothermia, collapse, or suspected severe carbon monoxide poisoning.

GAS EMERGENCY / CO

0800 111 999

Get everyone into fresh air first if you suspect carbon monoxide.

This guide is general public information for UK households. It is not a substitute for the emergency services, official local advice, or professional medical training. In an emergency, always call 999. Official warning and response advice can change — follow current guidance from the emergency services, the NHS and gov.uk/prepare. Three Day Kit (threedaykit.co.uk) is an independent brand and is not affiliated with, or endorsed by, the UK government or any official agency.

BEFORE

WINTER-PROOF THE HOUSEHOLD

Watch Met Office National Severe Weather Warnings and UKHSA Cold Health Alerts, and act on them early. A little preparation is cheaper and safer than trying to fix things after the heating has failed.

01 **Service heating safely and fit a CO alarm**
Have gas appliances checked by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm that meets British or European standards (BS Kitemark or EN 50291) and test it regularly. Know the signs of CO poisoning: headache, dizziness, nausea, flu-like symptoms, or several people and pets unwell at once.

02 **Keep heat in**
Draught-proof windows and doors, close curtains at dusk, and keep bedroom windows closed at night in a cold snap. If you cannot heat every room, plan to heat the living room by day and the bedroom before sleep. Official health advice is to aim for at least 18°C in the rooms you use, especially if anyone is 65 or over, has a health condition, or has limited mobility.

03 **Stock the house so you can stay in**
Keep three days of food and bottled water, any regular medicines (order repeat prescriptions at least five working days ahead), warm layers, hats, gloves, blankets or a sleeping bag, and a torch. If snow is forecast, check on anyone who may struggle to get to the shops.

04 **Prepare the car, but plan not to travel**
If you have to drive, pack a torch, warm clothes, a blanket, food and drink, a charger or power bank, a high-visibility layer, a shovel and a first aid kit. Check tyres, screenwash and fuel before you set off. Walking in ice needs shoes with a good grip.

05 **Register for support and know who to call**
The Priority Services Register (thepsr.co.uk) can help if you rely on energy for medical reasons or would struggle in a cut. Know your heating engineer, landlord, energy supplier and the 105 power-cut number. Frozen pipes are less likely if you know where the stopcock is and keep the home above freezing.

06 **Learn the signs of hypothermia**
It is a dangerous drop in body temperature below 35°C. Look for shivering, pale cold dry skin (on brown or black skin this may be clearer on the palms or soles), blue or grey lips, slurred speech, slow breathing, tiredness or confusion. A baby may be cold to touch, floppy, unusually quiet or sleepy, and may refuse to feed.

DURING

A COLD SNAP, SNOW, OR NO HEATING

01 Keep warm without taking risks

Wear several thin layers, keep your feet off a cold floor, and get up and move or stretch at least every hour. Close doors of unused rooms and block draughts with a towel at the foot of the door. Stay inside if you can. If the heating has failed, use blankets and gather in one room. Contact your energy supplier, heating engineer or landlord.

02 Do not create a carbon monoxide risk

Do not light a fire unless you have a proper appliance and a working chimney. Do not use camping stoves, barbecues or petrol generators indoors. A portable bottled-gas heater must be approved for indoor use and the room must be ventilated. If you suspect CO, get everyone out to fresh air and call 0800 111 999. Call 999 if anyone is severely unwell.

03 If you think someone has hypothermia

Call 999 or go to A&E — do not drive yourself. Move them somewhere sheltered, remove wet clothes, and wrap them in a dry blanket or sleeping bag, covering the head. If they are fully awake, give a warm non-alcoholic drink and some sugary food. Stay with them and keep them talking. Do not use a hot bath, hot water bottle or heat lamp, do not rub their skin, and do not give alcohol.

04 Travel only if you must

Check Met Office and National Highways or Traffic Scotland / Traffic Wales updates. Never drive through flood water from melt or rain on frozen ground. If you are stranded in a car, stay with the vehicle unless it is unsafe, keep a window slightly open, and run the engine only occasionally with the exhaust clear of snow.

AFTER

THAW, CHECK AND RECOVER

01 Check pipes, food and alarms

As the house warms, look for burst pipes and water stains. If a pipe has burst, turn off the stopcock and electricity if it is safe, and call a plumber. Follow Food Standards Agency rules if the fridge or freezer lost power. Test carbon monoxide and smoke alarms and restock your kit.

02 Watch health for a few days

Cold snaps increase heart attacks, strokes and breathing problems, sometimes after the coldest day has passed. Call NHS 111 or 999 if you are worried. Check again on neighbours who live alone.

WHAT TO HAVE IN YOUR KIT

Your Three Day Kit should already hold bottled water, no-cook food, a torch, a power bank, a radio, cash and medicines. For cold weather, add spare warm layers, hats, gloves, blankets or a sleeping bag, a charged phone, and any extra medication you might need if you cannot get out. Keep a carbon monoxide alarm fitted in the home, not loose in the bag.

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

TICK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

- [ ] Heating serviced by a suitably qualified engineer (Gas Safe for gas)
- [ ] Smoke alarms tested
- [ ] Warm layers, hats, gloves, blankets or a sleeping bag ready
- [ ] Torch, power bank and battery or wind-up radio
- [ ] Stopcock, trip switch and boiler controls located
- [ ] Car kit packed if we drive: blanket, torch, shovel, food, charger
- [ ] Hypothermia signs understood, and 999 agreed as the response
- [ ] Audible carbon monoxide alarm (BS EN 50291) fitted and tested
- [ ] Rooms we use can be kept at around 18°C, with curtains and draught-proofing
- [ ] Three days of food, water and regular medicines in the house
- [ ] Priority Services Register considered (thepsr.co.uk)
- [ ] Met Office and Cold Health Alerts watched in winter
- [ ] Household knows not to use stoves, barbecues or generators indoors
- [ ] Neighbour or family check-in plan for cold snaps

UK CONTACTS

WRITE THESE DOWN

EMERGENCY SERVICES
999
Hypothermia, collapse, or severe carbon monoxide symptoms.

GAS EMERGENCY / CO
0800 111 999
National Gas Emergency Service, 24 hours. Go into fresh air first.

NHS
111
Urgent medical advice, or 111.nhs.uk. Call 999 if life is at risk.

POWER CUT
105
Free in England, Scotland and Wales. NI: 03457 643 643.

MET OFFICE WARNINGS
metoffice.gov.uk
National Severe Weather Warnings and the Met Office app.

PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER
thepsr.co.uk
Extra support from energy and water companies.

GAS SAFE REGISTER
gassaferegister.co.uk
Find a registered engineer. 0800 408 5500.

OFFICIAL PREPAREDNESS ADVICE
gov.uk/prepare
Cold-weather pages on the Prepare / Be Ready campaign site.

SOURCES

Guidance in this booklet was checked against publicly available official advice in November 2026. Always follow the latest instructions from the emergency services and the links below.

1. UK government / UKHSA, keeping warm and well, and Prepare cold weather, snow and ice — gov.uk and prepare.campaign.gov.uk
2. Met Office, keeping your home warm this winter — weather.metoffice.gov.uk
3. NHS, hypothermia and carbon monoxide poisoning — nhs.uk
4. Chief Medical Officers' public health advice for keeping warm in extreme weather / national power outage scripts — gov.uk
5. Energy Networks Association / 105 — powercut105.com

General guidance only — not a substitute for the emergency services or professional medical training. Call 999 in an emergency. Independent brand, not a government publication.