UK EMERGENCY GUIDE

Fuel shortages & travel disruption

A fuel shortage, storm, strike or closed road can stop normal travel very quickly. The calm approach is to keep everyday journeys flexible, avoid panic filling, and have a way to get home, get to work, or stay put without relying on a full tank or a perfect train timetable.

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

01 Make only essential journeys, combine trips, and use walking, cycling or public transport where you can. Do not queue in a way that blocks roads or forecourts.

02 As a daily habit, avoid running the tank very low. During a shortage, do not rush to fill up "just in case" — panic buying is what empties the pumps for everyone, including essential services.

03 Before you travel, check National Rail, your bus or tram operator, National Highways or the traffic service for your nation, and Met Office warnings. Tell someone your route and when you should arrive.

LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY

999

Accident, medical emergency, or you are in immediate danger.

TRAVEL AND ROADS

nationalrail.co.uk

Also nationalhighways.co.uk, Traffic Scotland, Traffic Wales, and NI traffic.

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

MAKE TRAVEL LESS FRAGILE

You cannot store your way out of a national fuel shortage, and it is not safe or lawful to keep large amounts of petrol at home. What you can do is reduce how often you truly need a car, and prepare for delays.

01 **Keep a sensible amount of fuel in the tank, in ordinary times**
A useful habit is not to let the tank fall below about a quarter full, so a diversion or closure does not strand you. That is a day-to-day habit, not an instruction to top up the moment you hear of a shortage. In a disruption, follow official advice: essential journeys only, and no panic filling.

02 **Do not store petrol or diesel unsafely at home**
Spare cans in a hallway or under the stairs are a fire risk. If you ever keep a small amount of petrol, it must be in a suitable approved container, in limited quantity, and stored as the law and fire service advise — never in the living space, never near flames or boilers, and never as a “stockpile”. Do not decant fuel from a vehicle.

03 **Plan other ways to make essential trips**
Know a walking or cycling route for local journeys, and a bus, rail or lift-share option for anything further. Download or print maps and a timetable you can use offline. If you depend on a car for work, caring or medical appointments, talk to your employer or clinic now about what would happen in a disruption.

04 **Pack a small kit for the car or bag**
Official preparedness advice includes a torch, phone charger or power bank, warm or waterproof clothes, a blanket, water and food, a first aid kit, high-visibility clothing, jump leads and, in winter, a shovel. Take extra water in hot weather. Never leave children or pets in a parked car.

05 **Save official travel sources, not rumours**
National Rail, your operator app, National Highways, Traffic Scotland, Traffic Wales, TrafficWatch NI, Traveline (0871 200 22 33) and the Met Office. In a major incident, follow transport staff and the emergency services. See it, say it, sorted: report anything that feels wrong to staff or British Transport Police on 61016.

06 **Think about heating oil, deliveries and work**
If you use heating oil, do not wait until the tank is nearly empty in winter — but do not overfill or hoard drums unsafely either. If your job or a caring role is designated as essential in a formal fuel emergency, you would be told through official channels, not social media.

DURING

SHORTAGE, DELAY, OR YOU ARE STRANDED

01 **Cut journeys to what is genuinely essential**
Combine remaining trips, share lifts if it is safe, work from home if you can, and use public transport, walking or cycling where that still runs. If pumps are open with a limit, take only what you need. Do not block the forecourt, the road or a junction — that delays tankers and emergency vehicles.

02 **If you must travel, prepare to be late**
Check official updates before you leave, allow extra time, and tell someone your destination and expected arrival. Take medicines, a charged phone, a power bank, water, food and suitable clothing. Follow staff instructions at stations and on the roads. If you are delayed, it is usually safer to stay where you are and wait for advice than to set off across country on a guess.

03 **Drive to the conditions, and never through flood water**
Check tyres, oil, screenwash and fuel before you set off. In heat, ventilate the car and plan stops. If you break down, get to a place of safety if you can and follow National Highways (or the equivalent in your nation) guidance. If you are stranded in snow, stay with the vehicle unless it is unsafe.

04 **If fuel is being formally prioritised**
In a severe national shortage the government has emergency plans that can include purchase limits, restricted hours, or priority for essential services and public transport. Follow instructions at the pump and in official announcements. Do not assume a neighbour's rumour is policy.

AFTER

WHEN MOVEMENT IS NORMAL AGAIN

01 **Return to a calm routine, not a binge fill-up**
When supplies recover, fill the tank as you usually would. Restock the water, snacks and torch in the car. If you missed work, a medical appointment or a caring visit, reschedule rather than driving tired.

02 **Adjust your plan**
Note which alternative route or mode actually worked, and whether you need an offline map, a different commute, or a conversation with your employer. Keep the tank-habit, not a collection of fuel cans.

WHAT TO HAVE IN YOUR KIT

Your Three Day Kit at home means you can stay put if travel is a bad idea: water, no-cook food, medicines, torch, radio, power bank and cash. In the car or a day bag, keep a smaller version — water, a snack, a charger, warm or waterproof layers, a first aid kit and a paper list of numbers — so a long delay does not become an emergency.

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

TICK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

- [ ] Everyday habit of not running the tank extremely low (not panic topping-up)
- [ ] At least one non-car option for essential local journeys
- [ ] National Rail / operator, roads and Met Office sources bookmarked
- [ ] Car or bag kit: torch, charger, water, food, layers, first aid kit
- [ ] Medicines taken on any essential journey
- [ ] Heating oil (if used) not left until the tank is almost empty in winter
- [ ] British Transport Police text number 61016 saved
- [ ] No unsafe petrol or diesel stored in the house or hallway
- [ ] Offline map, and a paper note of a usual and alternative route home
- [ ] Traveline number saved: 0871 200 22 33
- [ ] Winter extras if relevant: blanket, shovel, screenwash, high-visibility layer
- [ ] Employer or caring plan agreed if I could not travel
- [ ] Household agrees: essential journeys only during a shortage, no blocking pumps
- [ ] Three Day Kit at home so we can stay in if travel is unwise

UK CONTACTS

WRITE THESE DOWN

EMERGENCY SERVICES
999
Accident, medical emergency, or immediate danger.

NHS URGENT ADVICE
111
If you are unwell on a journey and it is not a 999 emergency.

NATIONAL RAIL
nationalrail.co.uk
Train times and disruption. Follow staff instructions at stations.

ROADS
nationalhighways.co.uk
Traffic Scotland, Traffic Wales and TrafficWatch NI in those nations.

TRAVELINE
0871 200 22 33
Public transport journey planning across Great Britain.

BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE
61016
Text from a train or station if you see something that does not feel right.

MET OFFICE
metoffice.gov.uk
Weather warnings that affect roads and rail.

OFFICIAL PREPAREDNESS ADVICE
gov.uk/prepare
Travel-disruption 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 Prepare / Be Ready, transport disruption and delays — prepare.campaign.gov.uk/get-prepared-for-emergencies/travel-advice
2. GOV.UK, National Emergency Plan for Fuel (overview of national response tools) — gov.uk
3. National Highways severe-weather and breakdown guidance — nationalhighways.co.uk
4. Met Office seasonal travel advice — metoffice.gov.uk
5. THINK! vehicle safety checks — think.gov.uk

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.