

Be aware of dangers from carbon monoxide

People are reminded to be aware of the dangers from carbon monoxide (CO), a highly poisonous gas which is impossible to see, taste or smell and is often known as the 'silent killer'.

Regular checks and services

If you use an appliance that is fuelled with gas, oil, coal, kerosene, peat or wood you are potentially at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide may accumulate to dangerous and even deadly levels in homes, cars or poorly-ventilated areas.

The best way to protect yourself, and others, from the dangers of carbon monoxide is to make sure all fuel-burning appliances are installed, maintained and used properly.

They should be checked and serviced at least annually by a registered engineer.

All chimneys and flues should be inspected once a year and swept, if required, by a registered technician.

This also applies to any appliances you use in holiday homes, caravans and on board boats where faulty gas cookers, appliances or petrol-powered generators have led to carbon monoxide poisoning.

The following pages have useful information about gas safety and how to arrange getting an appliance serviced:

Carbon monoxide alarm

As an additional precaution, you should also install an audible carbon monoxide alarm.

These alarms have a limited life span, so if you already have one please check it to see if it is working properly. It might be time to buy a new one.

While carbon monoxide alarms can help alert you to the dangers if CO gas escapes, they must never be regarded as a substitute for the proper installation, maintenance, servicing and cleaning of appliances.

Carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms

[Carbon monoxide poisoning](#) can be fatal and can also cause long-term health problems if people are exposed to low doses over a long period of time.

Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can seem like many common ailments and may easily be confused with food poisoning, viral infections, flu (but without a raised temperature) or simple tiredness.

Signs to look out for include:

- headaches
- nausea and vomiting
- exhaustion
- drowsiness
- dizziness and light-headedness
- flu-like symptoms
- palpitations (feeling heart beat oddly)
- chest pain
- losing consciousness

Anyone who suspects they may be experiencing carbon monoxide poisoning should:

- immediately turn off all appliances
- go outside
- seek medical help

Further information on carbon monoxide can be found on the [Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland website](#).

More useful links

[Steps to reduce risk of burst pipes](#)

With the weather turning colder, it's important to prepare for winter conditions. Damage as a result of burst pipes is a possibility over the next few months. However, with some simple precautions the risk can be reduced.

Protecting from frost

The devastation caused by burst pipes cannot be underestimated. Potential repairs alone can run into many thousands of pounds.

Not only can the water cause structural damage to a property, but also to electrical equipment and personal items, including photographs that may not be replaceable.

Taking the following simple steps will significantly reduce the risk of frozen or burst pipes:

- insulate water tanks and pipes in unheated areas like lofts, garages and outbuildings
- fix dripping taps – a gentle trickle of water can freeze and completely block the pipe
- find your internal stop tap/ valve – it is usually, but not always, under your kitchen sink and normally closes by turning clockwise
- service the boiler regularly
- make sure doors and windows from unheated parts of your house are kept closed and try and stop any draughts from outside
- if you are away from home during the winter period, open the trap door into the roofspace to allow some of the warm air to circulate (this should be a temporary measure only, as it will cause condensation – tanks and pipes should be insulated)
- if you are away from home leave the heating on low and you could leave a key with someone who can check the house regularly
- write down the contact details of a registered plumber in case a pipe does burst

You can get more information at the page below:

If a property is not in use or occupied for a prolonged period of time it is advisable to turn the water supply off at the stop tap. You should maybe even consider draining down the system.

There is more information on the [NI Water website](#).

Dealing with frozen pipes

Most frozen pipes are found in the roofspace and below sink units. If you discover a frozen pipe, you should:

- turn off the water supply at the stop tap/ valve
- thaw along the pipe, starting from the end nearest the tap
- don't use a blow lamp or naked flame
- put hot water bottles or a thick cloth soaked in hot water over the frozen pipe or use a hair dryer at its lowest setting to thaw pipes (be careful not to warm them too quickly)
- don't leave taps dripping or running – the water may not flush down the plug hole if the pipes below are frozen

Burst pipes

If a pipe bursts, you should:

- turn off the stop tap/ valve
- try to block escaping water with thick cloth (for example, towels)
- turn on all taps to reduce flooding
- call a qualified plumber
- don't forget to turn off taps once the problem is fixed to avoid further flooding

Reporting a problem

If you have checked the pipes on your property and they are not burst or frozen, and you still have no water supply, contact NI Water on 03457 440088.

If you are a Housing Executive tenant and need an emergency repair, you should contact [your local District Office](#) during office hours.

You can also contact the [emergency out-of-hours service](#) on:

More useful links

[Nominations open for school pastoral awards](#)

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You can nominate a school for an award to recognise its exceptional pastoral care. Anyone who knows of a school going beyond what is reasonably expected to support pupils facing particular challenges or difficulties is encouraged to nominate it for the Derrytrasna Pastoral Care Award.

Pastoral care

Pastoral care in schools is about the support offered to a pupil or pupils by a teacher or school community in relation to the pupil's personal needs, rather than their schoolwork.

All schools are required to have pastoral care in place to include such issues as child protection and bullying.

Occasionally there are schools that go above and beyond to make a real difference to their pupils lives.

How to nominate

Nominations for the award should include:

- an explanation of the reason for the nomination
- the type of support offered; and
- why that support was regarded as exceptional

For more information about the award and details of how to nominate a school, visit the page below:

Nominations close on Friday 14 December.

More useful links

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[Preparing for winter driving conditions](#)

People are being advised to be prepared for the challenges of winter driving, and all road users to take extra care. From now until April more than 300 staff, more than 130 gritters, and 12 snow blowers will be on standby to keep traffic moving safely and freely on main roads during wintry conditions.

Darker morning and evenings

Now the clocks have changed, darker mornings and evenings, and lower temperatures, around this time of year make driving conditions more difficult.

All road users are advised to take extra care.

It's important to take personal responsibility and pay attention.

Drivers should:

- slow down
- never ever drink or take drugs and drive
- always wear a seatbelt

In particular, watch out for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and horse riders, as they will be much more difficult to see in the dark mornings and evenings.

Salting roads

The main roads which carry more than 1,500 vehicles a day are salted. In exceptional circumstances, some roads carrying between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles daily will also be salted. This means that the road network which carries 80 per cent of daily traffic will be treated.

Additional salt bins are provided on routes not included as part of the gritting network. These are free-of-charge for people to use themselves.

Arrangements are also in place to enlist the help of contractors, including farmers, to clear blocked roads following any heavy snowfalls.

The following page has more information:

Drive with care

Remember, you should heed the advice in the Highway Code and drive with extra care, even if roads have been salted.

You should also be prepared for road conditions changing over short distances, and take care when overtaking gritters.

You should note that:

- a journey could start or end on an untreated section of road
- salt does not act immediately, it needs vehicles to turn it into an effective solution
- roads can refreeze after spreading, particularly in showery conditions

There is more information on the page below:

Up-to-date road conditions information

You can get up-to-date information about road conditions during the winter on the [TrafficwatchNI](#) website.

More useful links

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[Winter infections and using antibiotics](#)

With winter upon us, many people will pick up sniffles, sore throats, colds,

and get infections. But it's useful to know the difference between a viral infection and a bacterial infection and how can both be treated.

Viral infections

As their names suggest, viral infections are caused by viruses, bacterial infections by bacteria.

Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections – they cannot help you recover from infections caused by viruses.

[Cold](#) and [flu](#) are viruses and antibiotics are useless against them. The best treatment is:

- plenty of rest
- hot drinks
- maybe paracetamol to relieve aches, pains and help reduce a high temperature – make sure not to take more than the stated dosage

Viral infections are very common and, as well as cold and flus, they can include many infections of the nose, sinuses, ears, throat and chest. Most of these can be self-treated without the need for a visit to the doctor and definitely no need for an antibiotic.

In fact if you take antibiotics when you don't need them, you could have some unpleasant side effects like an upset stomach, diarrhoea, or a skin rash.

Don't forget, if you do have a cough or cold, it's important to reduce your chances of spreading it to others by following good hygiene practices:

- [wash your hands](#) regularly
- if you sneeze or cough, use a tissue to help stop the spread of infection

Antibiotics do not prevent viruses such as the common cold or flu from spreading to other persons.

The first place to go if you're feeling unwell is the pharmacist, who can usually provide over-the-counter medication to help deal with your symptoms until your illness passes.

If you must go to the doctor, don't demand antibiotics from them.

Take [your doctor's](#) advice. They'll know what the best action to take is and if they say you don't need an antibiotic, don't demand one.

Bacterial infections

If you have a bacterial infection, your own immune system can clear many of these infections without the need for antibiotics. Antibiotics do little to speed up your recovery from most common infections.

If your symptoms don't go away or if you have any concern, it's important that you see your doctor.

If you really have a severe infection such as bacterial pneumonia, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics.

Antibiotics should only be taken for serious bacterial infections. They are life-saving drugs for infections like pneumonia and meningitis.

If we continue to take antibiotics when we don't need to, bacteria build up resistance, making antibiotics useless against fighting them. As it is the bacteria and not the person that become resistant to the drugs, antibiotic resistance affects everyone.

Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be difficult to treat so we need to protect the antibiotics we have to make sure they work when they're needed most.

We all have a role to play in [using antibiotics wisely](#).

More useful links

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