

Put safety first at Halloween

Put safety first this Halloween to make sure it's a night for treats not tragedies. Fireworks and sparklers can be dangerous, so make sure they are used safely and in line with the manufacturer's instructions. Follow the Firework Code.

Fireworks can be dangerous

Plan any firework display in advance to make it both safe and enjoyable. Anyone wishing to buy or use fireworks must have [a licence](#).

Although fireworks are entertaining and exciting, if not properly handled they can be extremely dangerous and can result in injuries, often serious ones.

Fireworks should only be lit in a safe and controlled environment by a responsible adult. You should:

- follow the Firework Code
- only buy fireworks marked with a CE mark – this shows fireworks meet European Safety Standards
- not drink alcohol if setting off fireworks
- keep fireworks in a closed box when not in use and keep away from anything that could cause them to light
- follow the manufacturer's advice on each firework and use them one at a time
- light them at arm's length using a taper and stand well back
- never go near a firework that has been lit, even if it hasn't gone off – it could still explode
- never put fireworks in their pocket or throw them
- always supervise children around fireworks
- keep pets and animals indoors – the flames and noise upset them
- not set off noisy fireworks late at night and never after 11.00 pm

There's more information about firework safety on the page below:

Fireworks can cause fear and distress, especially amongst older people and more vulnerable members of the community.

You are also reminded of the traumatic effects that fireworks can have on pets and farm animals.

Sparklers

Sparklers are often seen as being harmless but they do burn at fierce temperatures. To a young child, the heat from a sparkler is equivalent to the heat from a welding torch.

You should:

- store sparklers in a closed box in a cool, dry place
- always light sparklers one at a time and wear gloves, keeping them at arm's length
- never hold a sparkler in their hand while also holding a baby or child
- plunge finished sparklers hot end down into a bucket of water as soon as they have burnt out (sparklers stay hot for a long time)
- not take sparklers to public displays – it will be too crowded to use them safely
- never give sparklers to under fives – they will not understand how to use them safely
- always supervise children using sparklers, teach them how to use them properly, and give children woollen gloves to wear

Fancy dress costumes

Parents should be aware of the potential dangers of their children wearing fancy dress costumes, either shop bought or home-made, if they're around fireworks, sparklers, or open flames (such as pumpkins with candles).

If a child is wearing a fancy dress costume this Halloween:

- keep them away from naked flames – avoid using a naked flame or candle in pumpkins; use a torch, glow stick or battery-operated candle
- stop, drop and roll if clothing does catch on fire – to try to put the flames out and also to stop the flames from rising towards the face
- choose a costume and mask that doesn't restrict a child's visibility or vision
- make sure they wear woollen tights or 'heavy' trousers (jeans) and a woollen jumper under the costume
- supervise them well at all times

Look out for costumes that are labelled 'Low Flammability' 'BS5722' or have the European code 'BS EN 14878'.

Fireworks and the law

Fireworks must be bought from a licensed dealer, who is required to keep sales records.

Fireworks bought from other sources could be of a sub-standard quality, presenting an even bigger risk of injury. It is also essential that you have a licence when buying any fireworks.

You can find a list of licensed dealers on the [fireworks page](#).

For any enquiries on the use of fireworks or if you need help with applying for a licence, [phone the fireworks helpline](#).

More useful links

[Vaccine available to protect against shingles](#)

All people aged 70 and 78 years old are encouraged to get the shingles vaccine. It will help protect them against the common and painful disease and its complications.

Shingles

[Shingles](#) is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. After you recover from chickenpox, some of the virus remains inactive in the body and nervous system. It can then reactivate later in life when your immune system is weakened.

About a quarter of adults will get shingles at some point in their life.

For many people, shingles can be a mild infection with good recovery. But it can also be very painful and is more likely to affect people as they get older.

The older people are, the worse it can be, with some people left with pain lasting for years after the initial rash has healed.

Vaccine

The vaccine will be offered routinely to:

- people aged 70 years on 1 September 2018 (those born between 2 September 1947 and 1 September 1948, inclusive)
- people aged 78 on 1 September 2018 (those born between 2 September 1939 and 1 September 1940, inclusive)

Anyone eligible for the vaccine in previous years, but didn't get it, can get vaccinated this year if they are under 80 years of age.

The shingles vaccine is given as a single injection in the upper arm and, unlike the flu vaccine, you only need to have it once.

Side effects are usually quite mild and don't last very long. The most common side effects include:

- headache; and/ or

- pain and swelling where injected

You can find out more about the vaccination at the page below:

If you are invited for the vaccine by your GP, you are encouraged to get vaccinated to help avoid getting shingles and its painful after-effects.

Lowered immunity

People who have lowered immunity must not get the shingles vaccine, including anyone who has leukaemia, lymphoma or is having chemotherapy.

Other medicines can also lower immunity, for example, high doses of oral steroids.

Check with your GP if you are on any treatment, especially if it is prescribed to you at a hospital.

More useful links

[Be breast aware and get checked early](#)

All women are urged to be 'breast aware' and get screened when invited. It's vital to recognise the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, and to get checked early.

Breast screening

Prevention and early detection are key to saving lives from breast cancer.

All women who are invited for breast screening are encouraged to think about going.

Most women will have normal mammograms. Out of every 100 women who attend for screening, around four are asked to come back for further tests. Most of them will have a normal result.

There is information about screening on the page below.

Screening remains the best way of detecting breast cancer at an early stage when treatment can be more effective.

Signs and symptoms

It is important for women to look out for changes in the appearance of their breasts, such as:

- a change in size or outline of either breast, especially those caused by arm movement
- any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin
- veins that stand out more than usual

Women should be aware of any feelings of pain or discomfort in one part of either the breast or armpit, particularly if it is new and persistent.

Women should also look and feel for any lumps or thickening in either breast that feels different from the other breast, as well as any swelling or lumps under the armpit or around the collarbone.

Also look out for any changes to the nipple, such as a nipple that:

- has become pulled in
- has changed shape
- has a discharge
- bleeds
- has a rash or has crusted, flaky skin

If the change is due to cancer, earlier detection may mean simpler and more successful treatment.

Many changes are harmless but all should be checked by a GP.

You can find out more on the [breast cancer page](#).

While breast cancer is much more common in women, it can also affect men. In rare cases it develops in the small amount of breast tissue men have behind their nipples.

More useful links

Share this page

[Using antibiotics wisely is everyone's responsibility](#)

It's everyone's responsibility to use antibiotics responsibly. They are not effective against viral infections, including colds and flu. Antibiotic overuse is a serious problem and a potentially a threat to everyone's health. You should be guided by your GP or pharmacist as to whether or not you need an antibiotic.

How we can all help

[Antibiotic resistance](#) is a threat to human health and to medicines worldwide. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics could mean that in the future even the simplest infections cannot be treated and the most straightforward operations cannot be done.

This is an issue that affects every single one of us and could have devastating consequences. It is vital that we tackle this problem urgently so we can safeguard the health of ourselves, our children, and future generations.

Antibiotics should only be used for serious bacterial infections.

Some of the easy ways to help:

- practice good hand hygiene to help prevent the spread of infection in the first place – wash your hands after using the bathroom, before preparing or eating food, after coughing or sneezing, or if your hands are visibly dirty
- if you don't need antibiotics, for instance for [viral infections](#) like a cold or flu, don't take them
- speak to your GP or pharmacist before you ask for an antibiotic – don't demand antibiotics from your GP, they will make the decision on whether you need them or not
- if you're prescribed antibiotics, finish the course or medication (even if you start to feel better)
- never share antibiotics with anyone else

You can find more information about using antibiotics wisely at this link:

Colds or flu

If you have a cold or flu, antibiotics will not work. Most coughs, sore throats and earaches do not need antibiotics. Your body can usually fight these infections on its own.

Taking unnecessary antibiotics for conditions like these will contribute to them becoming less effective in being able to tackle the illnesses for which they were developed.

The first place to get advice is from your pharmacist. There are things you can get over the counter to look after yourself during your illness and ease the symptoms until it passes.

If you're worried, contact your GP's surgery, who will be able to advise on the best treatment for you.

You can find useful information on the pages below:

Antibiotics and pets

If you own a pet, there are some useful tips to help use antibiotics responsibly:

- keep your pet healthy to help it fight infection – provide food with a high nutritional value, have it vaccinated regularly and if it gets sick take it to your vet immediately
- do not share antibiotics between pets or re-use tablets for an earlier illness – human medicines should not be given to pets as they could be dangerous and ineffective
- make sure that suspected disease is accurately diagnosed – consult your vet early
- not every condition needs to be treated with antibiotics so don't expect antibiotics from your vet as they may not be needed
- if your vet does prescribe antibiotics it will be after a clinical assessment and they will decide which antibiotic, at what dose and for how long is correct
- follow the advice given by your vet and use any antibiotics prescribed as instructed on the label
- complete the full course prescribed by your vet even if the animal gets better after a few doses
- always take your vet's advice and comply with instructions provided for the administration of and disposal of unused medication

Using antibiotics in agriculture

Antibiotics are essential medicines for treating bacterial infections in animals. Everyone [using antibiotics in agriculture](#) should make sure they are used responsibly to ensure they remain effective.

Livestock owners are urged to take every possible action to prevent disease by having good farm management, biosecurity, and animal husbandry. This will help reduce the need for antibiotics.

More useful links

[Strong winds warning – information and advice](#)

With a weather warning for strong winds, there could be travel delays, risk of injury or danger to life from flying debris large waves in coastal areas, damage to buildings, fallen trees, and power cuts.

Weather warning

The Met Office has sent out a [weather warning for strong winds](#).

Weather warnings let the public and emergency services know about potentially hazardous conditions.

You can find out more about weather warnings on [the Met Office website](#).

Emergency numbers

You should note the following numbers in case of emergency:

- Emergency services – 999 or 112
- Northern Ireland Electricity Networks – 03457 643 643
- NI Gas Emergency Service – 0800 002 001
- Northern Ireland Water Waterline – 03457 440 088
- Flooding Incident Line – 0300 2000 100
- Housing Executive – 03448 920 901

Report a fallen tree or blocked road

You can report a fallen tree or blocked road at the following link:

Reporting a power cut

If your power is off and you want to report it or get more information, contact NIE Networks or visit their website:

You can find an updated list of areas affected by power cuts on the [NIE Networks website](#).

Flooding advice

If any flooding happens, you can report it by phoning the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 2000 100.

There is general flooding advice in the following section:

Roads information

You can get the latest updates about roads at this link:

School closures

You can find information about school closures at this link:

Public transport

For the latest information on bus and train services, go to the 'Travel

update' section on the [Translink website](#).

Forests, country parks and nature reserves

You're advised not to visit forests, [country parks](#) and [nature reserves](#) until the strong winds weather warning is over due to the increased risks of fallen trees, branches and debris.

Advice for road users

All road users are asked to pay attention to any road signs and temporary arrangements put in place during severe weather. Longer journey times or cancellations are possible as road, rail, air and ferry services are affected, with the chance that some roads and bridges could close.

High-sided vehicles are most affected by windy weather, but strong gusts can also blow a car, cyclist, motorcyclist or horse rider off course. This can happen on open stretches of road exposed to strong cross winds, or when passing bridges or gaps in the hedges.

In very windy weather a vehicle may be affected by turbulence created by large vehicles. Motorcyclists are particularly affected, so keep well back from them when they are overtaking a high-sided vehicle.

Motorists are also advised to drive with care due to possible wind-blown debris.

Travel advice

If you're planning to travel by air or sea, you should check with the ferry company or airline in case there are any delays or cancellations.

Strong winds advice

You should:

- keep your property in a well-maintained condition (for example replace/repair any loose roof tiles, guttering, and so on that could potentially come loose and cause injury or damage to property)
- secure loose objects such as ladders, garden furniture, wheelie bins, trampolines, or anything else that could be blown around
- close and securely fasten doors and windows
- park vehicles in a garage (if you have one) or keep them clear of buildings, trees, walls, and fences
- make sure you are prepared should there be a power cut

During a storm you should:

- stay indoors as much as possible
- if you do go out, try not to walk or shelter close to buildings and trees

- not go outside to repair damage while the storm is ongoing
- not drive unless your journey is really necessary
- if you're a farmer, not enter fields bordered by trees or with powerlines unless absolutely necessary

After a storm you should:

- be careful not to touch any electrical/ telephone cables that have been blown down or are still hanging
- not walk too close to walls, buildings, and trees as they could have been weakened

Preparing for a power cut

It's important to be prepared for a potential loss of power. You should:

- know where your household fuses and trip switches are so that you can check if the problem is with your electrics only
- test smoke alarms regularly
- keep a supply of new batteries in torches and radios (for checking updates on news bulletins)
- keep a supply of candles
- keep mobile phones, laptops or tablets fully charged – so you will have use of battery power for a short time at least
- have the telephone numbers you might need to hand (as well as mobile phones, a non-mains powered landline telephone will help you stay in touch during any disruptions to your power supply)
- if you have a baby at home, make sure you have a supply of pre-prepared formula baby milk (if used) and prepare a flask of hot water to heat bottles and baby food (it is always safer to make up a fresh feed; when this is not possible, feeds should never be stored for longer than 24 hours)

If you depend on electrical equipment that is vital to your health, contact Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) Networks to get on their Critical Care Register:

If your electricity goes off

If your electricity goes off, you should:

- check your fuses and trip switches – then check if your neighbours are without power
- leave one light on
- leave your fridge/ freezer switched on with the door shut to maintain a low temperature
- check that other electrical appliances and machinery are switched off at the wall
- preferably use a torch, oil or gas lamp as a source of light rather than candles
- if you must use naked flames, please take extra care and make certain

that they are put out before you go to bed

- check on elderly or vulnerable neighbours in your area to make sure they are okay
- if you are using a generator, be careful where you site it in case of carbon monoxide poisoning

Water supply

In the event of difficulties with the water and sewerage, you will get the most up-to-date information on areas experiencing disruption on the [NI Water website](#). This includes a full postcode search facility.

You can also phone Waterline 24 hours a day/ 365 days a year on:

More useful links