

Risks of buying illegally-imported dogs

If you're thinking of buying a pet dog, beware unknowingly paying for one which has come from outside the UK and has not been properly vaccinated. Disease and having the dog quarantined are some of the risks.

Illegal trade

There is an ongoing illegal trade in pups imported from eastern Europe. There has been an increase in cases of genuine buyers being duped into buying illegally-imported pups.

These pups are often bred in very poor conditions, which give rise to major health and welfare concerns.

Risk of disease and quarantine

All dogs entering Northern Ireland from outside the UK, must be:

- at least 15 weeks old
- [microchipped](#)
- correctly vaccinated against rabies
- treated for tapeworm (unless the dog comes directly from Finland, Republic of Ireland, Malta or Norway)
- in possession of a pet passport or veterinary certificate

Where the legal requirements are not met, pets will either:

- go into quarantine for a period of up to four months at the owners' expense
- be sent back to the country they have travelled from or
- face the possibility of being destroyed

This is necessary to keep Northern Ireland free of diseases such as rabies and Alveolar Echinococcus (a very severe human disease caused by tapeworms).

Not all families will be able to afford these additional costs and therefore face the risk of having to experience the heartache of not being reunited with their family pet.

Advice

Useful advice about buying puppies (and specifically imported dogs) is provided on the following page:

It also has detailed guidance on the requirements for pet animals being brought into Northern Ireland from countries outside the UK.

Alternatively anyone considering bringing a pet into the country can contact Trade Section, DAERA for advice by:

It is also worth remembering there are many puppies and dogs cared for by local animal charities needing new homes with caring owners.

More useful links

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[Think about fire safety over the Christmas period](#)

Be aware of fire safety over the Christmas period and check in on older or vulnerable people. You should also make sure that everyone in your house knows what to do in the event of a fire and how to escape safely.

Extra fire risks at Christmas

Christmas is a time when extra fire hazards are in the home, including:

- candles
- portable heaters
- open fires that haven't been lit for a long time
- fairy lights
- overloaded sockets

Fires can start easily. To reduce the risk of fire over the festive period, you should:

- check that your Christmas lights conform to the British Standard
- never use lights with worn or frayed cables
- turn off lights at night or when you are leaving the house
- never place candles near your Christmas tree, decorations or furnishings

- put candles in a purpose-made holder and on a heat-resistant surface
- never put candles under shelves
- never leave burning candles unattended
- never attach decorations to lights or heaters
- never overload electrical sockets
- never leave a cooker unattended – most fires start in the kitchen
- make sure cigarettes are completely stubbed out before going to bed
- keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children
- keep heaters away from soft furnishings and decorations

You can find out more about fire safety at the following links:

Also, people relax and can sometimes become complacent about their fire safety. You should:

- test your smoke alarm(s) every week and make sure to replace the battery or the smoke alarm if it is not working
- make sure anyone staying in your house knows what to do in an emergency – make a fire escape plan
- take the time to check on elderly or vulnerable relatives and neighbours this Christmas – make sure they are fire safe

You should try and celebrate Christmas and New Year safely – the risk of accidents is greater after [drinking alcohol](#).

Older or vulnerable people

Check in with older family, friends, neighbours and those who are isolated in the community and make sure they have a working smoke alarm.

Check their home for Christmas fire hazards and advise them of steps they can take to help 'STOP' fire in their home.

If you're worried about the fire safety of someone in your community you can register them for a [free Home Fire Safety Check](#).

Firefighters will install or check that smoke alarms are working, help to identify any obvious dangers, and advise on an escape plan.

More useful links

[Make sure your farm is ready for severe weather](#)

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If you own a farm, think about the main risks winter brings and work out how you would deal with severe weather. How would it affect your ability to provide water, food and shelter for your animals?

Winter problems

Potential problems over winter include:

- frozen and [burst pipes](#)
- [snow](#)
- interruption of water supply
- [flooding](#)
- difficulty in moving materials or stock around the farm
- problems with deliveries to or collections from the farm

Weather forecast

Keep a close eye on the weather forecast so that you are able to take appropriate action, for example:

- consider whether you need to move animals to lower ground or fodder stocks to a more sheltered location
- if farm lanes become unsafe in the event of snow and ice, consider the need for marker signs at the edges and/ or alternative routes
- keep main access areas ice-free/ salted to avoid potential accidents that may involve humans, animals, or machinery
- if milk collections are suspended make sure you have extra storage capacity in place
- if feed deliveries can't get through, make sure you have enough feed stored to cover three days

Water supply

Clean water essential on all farms but its supply may be interrupted by frozen or burst pipes. You should aim to have at least 24 hours of water stored.

The following checklist should help:

- make sure you know the layout of pipes within your land – it should be recorded on a map
- know where your stop valves are and make their location more obvious by marking them with one of Northern Ireland Water's free stop valve tags
- consider isolating your water supply to areas of the farm not used during winter – you may need to install new stop valves to make this possible
- keep a supply of relevant fittings to repair any leakages
- know where your meters are located and check them regularly – an unexpectedly high reading could indicate a leak and should be investigated
- inspect troughs not in use at this time of year and consider turning off the water supply and draining the trough
- underground pipes should be buried at least 750 mm below ground level
- make sure any pipes within buildings are insulated and protected from livestock

- make sure that all tanks, pipes and pumps are in good working order and not leaking – and fix dripping taps
- have the name and contact details of at least one registered plumber easily available in case of an emergency
- keep farm watercourses clean to help ensure that water flows easily away following a thaw to minimise the risk of flooding
- to report a water supply problem, contact [Northern Ireland Water](#)

Prepare your farm for the unexpected – it could save you a lot of problems in the future.

More useful links

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[Know your alcohol limits during the festive season](#)

Drinking too much alcohol can have long-term effects on health. People should consider setting limits for themselves and keep an eye on how many drinks they're having over the festive season. It's also important not to binge drink.

Drinking guidelines

Christmas is a great time to relax and meet up with family, friends and work colleagues to celebrate, but it is very easy to overindulge.

[Alcohol guidelines](#) recommend that both men and women drink no more than 14 units a week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level.

If anyone does drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread this evenly over three days or more – don't 'save up' your units for a particular day or a party.

Binge drinking is associated with particular risks to health, including damage to the liver, heart, brain and stomach.

You can find out more the [how alcohol affects your health page](#).

If you're pregnant, or are trying for a baby, as a precaution [you should not drink any alcohol](#) at all.

Tips and advice

Some tips for managing your drinking:

- eat before or while drinking and avoid salty snacks, which make you thirsty
- be assertive – don't be pressured into drinking more than you want or intend to
- know your limits and stick to them
- stay busy, don't just sit and drink – dance or have a game of pool if you're at a pub
- try not to confuse large measures of alcohol with standard measures (for example, a glass of wine served at a party or at home may be much larger than the standard 125ml)
- keep track of your drinks and don't let people top up your drink until it's finished
- try alternating alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks
- add plenty of mixer to your drinks to make them last longer
- avoid rounds, 'shouts' and kitties – drink at your own pace, not someone else's
- drink slowly – take sips, not gulps

Mental health

[Alcohol](#) can also have an impact on your [mental health](#), and if you're hungover you can feel anxious and low.

Some people may feel down over Christmas and drinking can make this worse.

If you think someone might be in need of immediate help, find out what to do at the page below:

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call [Lifeline](#) on:

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

[Take time to check your oil tank](#)

Take time to check your oil tank during the cold weather to protect your pocket and the environment. As well as the financial cost of losing heating

oil, it can also cause serious problems to the environment by polluting rivers, harming wildlife and contaminating ground and drinking water.

Monthly check

'Clean-up' costs of an oil spill can be significant and are not always covered by household insurance policies.

You should check your tank and its pipes once a month and if you find a problem it should be fixed as soon as possible.

You can find more details about what you should do on this page:

If you notice a drop in oil level, don't assume that oil has been stolen. Leaks of underground fuel lines can often be happening for some time before oil contamination can be seen.

Oil leaks or spills

If your tank is leaking, you should act quickly and contact your insurance company.

Try to stop the oil soaking into ground or going down drains.

Don't put off taking action or assume the problem will go away. The quicker the leak can be dealt with, the less oil will be lost and damage can be reduced.

You can get more advice about what to do, including arranging a clean-up, on the [oil spills at home page](#).

To report an oil spill or leak that could affect rivers or coastal waters, you should contact the [Northern Ireland Environment Agency's](#) (NIEA) 24-hour water pollution hotline on:

More useful links