

your health guide

NHS
Eileanan Siar
Western Isles

Winter 2025/26

Welcome to your 4-page pull-out winter guide from NHS Western Isles!

This useful guide offers help and guidance for you (and your household) to ensure you get the right care in the right place this winter, as well as helping you to keep safe, well and warm.

Emergency contacts



NHS 24 111

NHS Inform 0800 224488
Helpline (for questions about your health or health service)

Electric (power cuts) 105

Water 0800 0778 778

Gas 0800 111 999

Police (Emergency) 999

Police (Non-emergency) 101

Faire Alarm 01851 701702
Service

NHS Western Isles 01851 704704

Western Isles Women's Aid 01851 704750

British Red Cross 01851 702897

For winter travel advice (safe driving, gritting and road monitoring cameras for the Braighe, Barvas moor, the Clisham and Castlebay) visit the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) website at: <https://cne-siar.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/road-monitoring-cameras>

Keep healthy this winter

The colder winter months can have a significant impact on your health and wellbeing. 'Self care' is about looking after your health and covers your physical, mental and emotional health.

- **Vaccination:** one of the most important things you can do to help you avoid winter illness is getting any vaccinations you are eligible for. Winter vaccines help protect you from flu and COVID-19. Find out about what vaccines you are eligible for and our local vaccination schedule at: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/vaccination-services. To amend or cancel a scheduled vaccination appointment, please call 01851 448 567.

- **Maintaining a well stocked medicine cabinet** means you'll receive the right treatment immediately. Make sure you have some over-the-counter (OTC) remedies for common seasonal illnesses in your medicine cabinet. That could include paracetamol and ibuprofen for pain relief; anti-histamines to help allergies; anti-diarrhoeals and oral rehydration sachets for diarrhoea; indigestion remedies such as an antacid; mild laxative for constipation; a first aid kit; and medicines specifically for children (your pharmacist can advise on the most suitable ones to keep in the house).

Remember that medicines go out of date, so don't overstock your medicine cabinet. Always follow the advice on the pack, and if your symptoms continue (or are severe) get further advice by:

- calling your GP
- visiting your local Pharmacist
- visiting NHS Inform: www.nhsinform.scot
- calling NHS 24 on 111.

- **Recognising symptoms and getting the correct treatment** is important to ensure your health doesn't deteriorate during the winter months. NHS Inform offers a wealth of information on illnesses and conditions, including cancer, heart, diabetes, injuries and muscle, blood and lymph, bone and joints. Find out more at: www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions.

- **Ensure you practice good hand and respiratory hygiene** by washing or hand sanitising regularly - and if you cough or sneeze trap it in a tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately in a bin (or cough/sneeze into your elbow). This helps to prevent the spread of viruses like flu and COVID-19 as well as the winter vomiting bug. Find out more about winter illnesses at: www.nhsinform.scot/winter-illness

Do:

- ✓ speak to your local pharmacy for advice about minor illnesses, treatments and medication
- ✓ contact your local optician if you have an eye problem
- ✓ contact your GP practice, optician or dentist by phone or online first
- ✓ arrive on time for healthcare appointments and notify the service at the earliest opportunity if you are unable to attend.

Getting the Right Care for You

If you have an urgent condition that is not life threatening, you should contact NHS24 free day or night on 111. Alternatively, you can contact your GP for urgent advice and treatment during normal working hours. This helps protect our hospital Emergency Departments so that those with life threatening conditions receive the care they need.

NHS 24 111 Service

The 111 service provides urgent care and advice (that isn't a life threatening situation) when your GP, pharmacy or dental practice is closed. The service can also help if you are in mental distress.

As well as English, the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) on the 111 service is available in various languages: Arabic, Mandarin, Polish, Spanish, Romanian, Sorani and Ukrainian.

BSL users can also communicate with Contact Scotland BSL, and people with hearing and speech difficulties can use Relay UK (Previously Next Generation Text) to call the phone-based services.

If it's not a medical emergency and you're unsure about what to do, you can also check your symptoms using NHS24's quick self-help guides at www.nhsinform.scot/self-help-guides

NHS Inform's self-help guides suggest steps to deal with your health situation. Tailored guidance on common ailments and treatments include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, earache, fevers, back pain, rashes, urinary infections, and sore throats.

You can also visit www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/right-care-right-place

In an emergency dial 999.

Walking on ice

Stay safe during icy conditions by doing the penguin walk when walking on ice to help avoid winter slips and broken bones!



The Penguin Walk

- Bend slightly and keep your knees loose
- Point your feet out slightly
- Extend your arms to your sides
- Walk flat footed, taking short slow steps
- Keep your centre of gravity over your feet.

Try to avoid carrying a heavy bag as this will cause your weight to shift unevenly.

It's also important to watch where you're stepping and be aware of your surroundings. If you do go out when weather is wintry, remember to dress warmly, wear sensible shoes with a good grip.

Substance Use



The festive season is a period that we all tend to indulge ourselves and many of us give in to excess. For someone dealing with a substance misuse problem, this can be a dangerous path.

The Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership (OHADP) promotes the dangers of alcohol misuse and treatment available.

If you are worried about your (or someone else's) drug taking, view the OHADP Recovery Support Services Directory, which offers a wide range of local and national support contacts.

- Outer Hebrides Alcohol & Drug Partnership: www.outerhebadp.com

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk or tel. 0800 9177650.

- Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs www.sfad.org.uk or tel. 08080 101011

Naloxone is used to reverse the effects of an overdose from drugs such as Heroin, Methadone, Buprenorphine and Oxycodone, as well as other illicit and prescribed opiate-based medications. You can request a Naloxone kit by post - either pre-filled injection or nasal spray. Free training is also provided. Contact Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD) on their secure online portal at: www.sfad.org.uk/support-services/take-home-naloxone

Mental health: you're not alone

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. The festive season can affect our mental health in lots of different ways. This could be if Christmas is part of your life, or if it's happening around you. It's a time of year that often puts extra pressure on us. Many people find this time of year particularly tough for a variety of reasons.

Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are normal emotions and reactions, but at times they can become overwhelming. If you're experiencing stress or anxiety, there are a range of resources and support on NHS Inform.

You may want to limit how much time you spend on social media or watching the news, too much of either can make you feel anxious or overwhelmed, and can negatively impact our wellbeing.

It helps to talk to friends and family, don't cut off from those you love and trust, even if you feel really fed up – try and pick up the phone and actually have a conversation with someone.

Depression

It's normal for some experiences to leave you feeling low. But, if the negative feelings don't go away, or are stopping you carrying on with normal life, support is available.

Symptoms of depression can be very different from person to person. As a general rule,

if you are depressed you feel hopeless, sad and lacking interest in things that used to make you feel happy. Depression symptoms are bad enough to interfere with work, social life and family life, and can persist for weeks or months, or even longer.

Remember that the NHS wants to hear from you if you have health problems – please do not leave them. If you have a healthcare appointment, please try to keep it. You shouldn't put off contacting a doctor about your mental health: the earlier you seek help, the better.

If the festive season is hard for you, it is important to remember you are not alone.

Things to help could include keeping physically active when you can; eating well – include plenty of warm drinks and at least one hot meal each day; and maintaining social connections with friends and family online or by phone if you're unable to get out and about.

There are Anxiety, Depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) Self Help Guides at NHS Inform: www.nhsinform.scot/self-help-guides

Local Mental Wellbeing Website

The site offers support and advice on how to strengthen your mental health. Visit www.mentalwellbeing.wihb.scot.nhs.uk

National and local support

Samaritans

Available 24/7. Freephone 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org Visit www.samaritans.org/scotland

Breathing Space

Phone and web-based service for low mood, depression or anxiety. Freephone 0800 838587

Kooth

Safe and anonymous support for young people 11-25 years. Visit www.kooth.com

If you feel unable to keep yourself safe, it's a mental health emergency. If you feel like you might attempt suicide, or may have seriously harmed yourself, you need urgent medical help. Please either call 999 or go to the Emergency Department.

Catch 23 Drop-in Centre

Drop-in service Monday-Friday from 12 noon-4pm, and Saturdays from 11am-3pm (excluding public holidays), at 23 Bayhead, Stornoway.

Uist Drop-in Service

Warm hub cafe every Wednesday (excluding public holidays) from 11am - 2.30pm. An-Caladh, East Camp, Balivanich, Benbecula.

Mental health emergencies are serious. You're not wasting anyone's time.

Emergency contraception



Emergency contraception can be obtained free of charge from local Emergency Departments, all pharmacists or dispensing GP Practices.

Emergency contraception can be taken within 72 hours of having unprotected sex, but is more effective the sooner it is taken.

Longer-lasting contraception is more effective and could be better suited to your lifestyle. Once fitted it can last from 3 to 10 years and you can stop using it whenever you like. Longer-lasting contraception gives you more choice. However a condom should also be used to help protect against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

For advice and access on the long-term contraception method right for you, contact your local Family Planning Clinic or GP Practice or visit www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/our-services/sexual-health-services



To make sure you access the care you need in the right place, visit:
www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/right-care-right-place

Power of Attorney

There may come a time at any age, due to an accident, a head injury, a stroke or an ongoing progressive illness, such as dementia, that anyone can lose capacity. This means when a person no longer has the ability to use and understand information to make or communicate their decisions.

Many people believe when they are unable to make decisions for themselves, that their spouse/partner, next of kin or named person will automatically take over making decisions for them - but this is **not** the case without having a registered Power of Attorney (PoA) in place.

A PoA is a vital legal document that everyone over 16 years, irrespective of their current health and fitness, should have in place. It grants someone that you know and trust, the authority to take action or make decisions on your behalf, when you no longer have capacity to do so.

In fact, put simply, without a PoA any future decisions taken for you may instead be taken by a

doctor, the local authority or the court. This includes you receiving medical treatment, your home and living situation, and managing your financial affairs. Your family/named person would then have to apply to the Court for a Guardianship or Intervention Order for them to manage your affairs, which can be a long and expensive process.

Many also assume that by having a Will in place, that the Will will suffice. However, it is incredibly important to note the difference between a Will and a Power of Attorney - a Will only applies **after** your death, whereas a Power of Attorney applies while you are still alive. For further information, or to find out if you are eligible for Legal Aid to help you set up a free Power of Attorney, visit the My Power of Attorney website at: mypowerofattorney.org.uk

In partnership with local solicitors, NHS Western Isles has produced a number of short films about the importance of having a Power of Attorney. View these at: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/our-services/home-care

Fever in Children

It can be extremely worrying if your child has a high temperature, but it's very common and often clears up by itself without treatment. A quick and easy way to find out whether your child has a fever is to take their temperature using a thermometer.

Causes of a high temperature

Most fevers are caused by infections or other illnesses. The high body temperature makes it more difficult for the bacteria and viruses that cause infections to survive. Common conditions that can cause fevers include upper respiratory tract infections (RTIs), flu, ear infections, roseola – a virus that causes a temperature and a rash and tonsillitis. Your child's temperature can also be raised after vaccinations, or if they overheat because of too much bedding or clothing.

Contact your GP if your child:

- is under 3 months and has a temperature of 38°C (101°F) or above
- is over 3 months and has a temperature of 39°C (102°F) or above
- has other signs of illness, such as a rash, as well as a high temperature

If your GP is closed, phone 111.

Phone 999 or attend the Emergency Department if your child:

- has a high temperature that's lasted for 5 days or more
- has persistent vomiting
- doesn't want to eat, or isn't their usual self and you're worried
- has a high temperature that does not come down with paracetamol
- is dehydrated – such as nappies that are not very wet, sunken eyes, and no tears when they're crying.
- has a stiff neck
- has a rash that does not fade when you press a glass against it (use the 'glass test' from Meningitis Now)
- is bothered by light
- has a fit (febrile seizure) for the first time (they cannot stop shaking)
- has unusually cold hands and feet

Other warning signs can be found within NHS Inform's Fever in Children section at: www.nhsinform.scot



Repeat Prescriptions

In advance of the public holidays during the festive period, NHS Western Isles is reminding our communities to put a note in their diaries/calendars to order their repeat medications well in advance of planned closures - BUT only if these medications are needed.



Remember that unused medications cannot be recycled, so are not able to be reissued to another person. Even if you never open them, once medicines have left the pharmacy, they cannot be recycled or reused by anyone else. Should you have any queries about a prescribed medication you are taking, please contact your GP or Pharmacist.

Those with quantities of out-of-date or no longer used prescribed medications, are encouraged to safely dispose them by returning them to their GP Practice or local pharmacy. Please do not bin or flush unwanted prescribed medications, as these can harm the local environment, cause risk to other people, and also cause household toilet/water contamination.

Hospital at Home

The 'Hospital at Home' service provides care in the community, which is equivalent to the care provided within hospital. Patients are referred to Hospital at Home by a clinician. It is used where a patient would normally require admission to hospital but care at home is deemed more medically appropriate, whilst ensuring appropriate and safe patient care.

Patients are treated in their own place of residence (their own home, a relative's home or a care/nursing home) rather than receiving care in hospital. The range of conditions that could be managed through Hospital at Home includes a wide range of conditions such as infections needing intravenous antibiotics, respiratory patients needing short term oxygen therapy and those requiring intravenous fluids for dehydration.

The service is managed by a dedicated NHS Western Isles clinical team and can be used to support discharge from hospital, or to avoid hospital admission. Patients remain under the care of a hospital consultant and are monitored on a 'virtual ward' within the hospital's electronic systems.

Keep warm this winter

You should heat your home to a temperature that is comfortable for you. Low indoor temperatures can have a serious impact on your health, especially if you have medical conditions or are older.

Simple changes can help to keep you and your home warm including:

- heating rooms you spend a lot of time in, such as the living room or bedroom, to at least 18°C
- trying to reduce draughts; you can fit draft excluders around doors cheaply
- keeping your bedroom windows closed at night
- wearing several layers of thinner clothing; this could keep you warmer than one thicker layer.

Anyone who would like more information on energy advice can contact The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) by telephoning (01851) 706121 or emailing: info@tighean.co.uk

Read our section opposite on the safe use of hot water bottles, if you plan on using hot water bottles this winter.

Cost of Living Support

The Cost of Living Support Scotland website provides information on the wide range of advice and financial support.

The website includes information on help available for households to meet rising energy, housing and other costs. It also provides details on accessing Scottish and UK social security payments, including online benefit calculators, as well as wider health and wellbeing information.

Visit: <http://gov.scot/costoflivingsupport>. However, if you do not have internet access, you can ask your local library staff to help; this is a free service and staff are happy to help.



Are you a carer?

A carer is a person of any age who provides unpaid care and support to a family member, friend or neighbour who is disabled, has an illness or long-term condition, or who needs extra help as they grow older.

Carers may be stretched to the limit – juggling care with work and family life, struggling to make ends meet and often battling with poor health themselves. Carers Scotland offers expert financial and practical information and guidance, championing your rights and supporting you in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or wherever you are.

Carers of all ages are encouraged to find out about the Carer Support Payment, benefits for carers, help with health, care and household costs, and dealing with debt. Contact Carers Scotland by telephoning 0141 378 1065, emailing advice@carersuk.org or visiting www.carersuk.org/scotland

Remember unpaid and young carers are eligible for free flu vaccination. For further details visit www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/vaccination-services

Hot water bottle safety

With temperatures dropping and the cost of living rising, many opt to use hot water bottles. To avoid burns and scalds, follow these safety tips:

- never fill a hot water bottle with boiling water- it will degrade the edges
- always use a cover for your hot water bottle
- don't fill the bottle more than two thirds and be careful when squeezing air out
- check the daisy wheel on the neck of the

Food Bank support

Sadly, some people have to choose between either paying bills or feeding themselves and/ or their families. Illness, benefit delay, domestic violence, debt, redundancy, family breakdown, and extra or unexpected bills are just some of the reasons why people go without food.

Food Bank support is for anybody who needs short-term food support. This can include those who are homeless, unemployed or employed, but their pay is insufficient to meet their needs.

If you, or someone you know is struggling, view the list of Food Banks available in the Western Isles at: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/cost-of-living-support

Elder Abuse

Christmas can be a wonderful time of the year, however things may not necessarily be so cheerful for some of our older and most vulnerable citizens.

Regardless of our age, we should be able to live safely, free from abuse and neglect. Sometimes, though, you may feel at risk, or you may be concerned about another person.

If this happens, there are people you can speak to and there is help available. Abuse can come in various forms, including domestic, physical, psychological, financial, and sexual.

If you feel unsafe or are worried about someone else, please tell someone about it. This may feel difficult, especially if the person abusing you is a close friend or relative, but abuse and neglect are never acceptable.

You don't have to put up with it, and there is help available for you.

For advice or support contact Hourglass Scotland, tel. 0808 808 8141 or free text 078 6005 2906, or the Age UK Advice Line on 0800 678 1602.

bottle for when it was manufactured - it's best not to use hot water bottles older than 3 years.

In the event of a serious burn or scald take the following steps:

- remove or cut off any clothing covering the area
- place the burn under cool running water for 20 minutes, but keep the rest of the person warm
- call 999 in an emergency
- cover the burn loosely with cling film.

Can Self-directed Support help you?

Do you feel you need care support at home? Are you, or do you have a loved one who is unable to return home due to a lack of home carers in your local area?

Self-directed Support (SDS) assists people who need social care to live independently and with the right support. If eligible for SDS, you would play a role in deciding how that social care is organised and provided to you. There are four options to access SDS:

Option 1: A Direct Payment - The payment is made direct and you organise support yourself. This means you becoming an employer and recruiting a suitable individual to provide personalised care services to your individual needs and wishes.

Option 2: An Individual Service Fund - You choose and direct your support and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar or another organisation arranges it all and handles the finances.

Option 3: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar organised - When Comhairle nan Eilean Siar organises your care from their staff and from their preferred providers.

Option 4: A Combination - A combination of any of the first 3 options.

For further information contact Advocacy Western Isles, which offers Self Directed Support Services to support you, even if you have been assessed as not eligible for care input from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Contact Advocacy Western Isles by emailing: office@advocacywi.co.uk or tel. 01851 701755. Additional information can be found at: www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/our-services/home-care

Supporting others

If you have vulnerable neighbours, relatives or know someone with heart or breathing problems, as we approach the winter months, it's important that you check in with them to make sure they:

- are feeling well
- are warm enough at home
- have enough food and medicine if they're unable to go out in bad weather.

If you're concerned that someone isn't coping, contact Comhairle nan Eilean Siar or the Age Scotland helpline. This is available on 0800 12 44 222, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.