

The Cold Hurts The Old

ALONE ADVISES CHECKING ON OLDER NEIGHBOURS DURING EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS

Extreme cold temperatures can have serious effects on health and wellbeing of many older people

(To download this statement as a pdf please click here [Risk to Older People From Cold Weather](#))

December 14, 2011

With heavy snowfalls forecast and a cold snap expected to last at least through the weekend, ALONE, the charity which supports older persons in need, is stressing the importance of members of the public checking on their older neighbours, family and friends who live alone. Extreme cold temperatures can have a disproportionate effect on older people, particularly those living alone or those with limited mobility and health issues.

A report published yesterday by the Institute of Public Health has shown that many older people are struggling to remain warm and well at home as a result of the current economic climate. Over 62% of older people surveyed were very or somewhat worried about the price of heating their home, and faced with the very real dilemma to “heat or eat”. ALONE has been a constant advocate for decisive action on fuel poverty among older people, and acts to raise awareness of this growing problem.

ALONE also urges older persons who are concerned about their own wellbeing during the cold weather to ask for assistance and help when needed. Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE stressed “Asking for help is not showing a lack of independence. Neighbours and others can be very helpful, but sometimes you do need to ask for help. We’re reminding members of the public that ALONE provides a Community Response service which can assist with any concerns or needs that an older person in need may have.”

Members of the public who have a concern about an older person, or older persons themselves with concerns, can contact ALONE on (01) 679 1032. The charity, which depends on donations from the public, has volunteers and staff ready to act on requests for assistance, and the charity is also working with other organisations in this regard. If there are concerns in relation to food, heat, or medication, ALONE stand ready to assist and advise.

Older people are advised to stay warm by ensuring they have adequate heat; that they wear layers of light but warm clothing; eat at least one hot meal per day; take frequent, gentle exercise to keep warm; and to stay indoors. It is advised that repeat prescriptions are ordered in advance during the winter period – older people are also advised to have a list of important phone numbers close to their phone.

Severe cold weather can have drastic effects on older people with existing health problems. People aged over 65 are 7 times more likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of low temperatures compared with those aged 18 to 44. There is a significant rise in mortality rates among over 65's during the winter period. During the winter of 2006/2007 (the most recent figures available) there were 1,281 excess winter deaths (i.e. the number of deaths occurring in the winter months compared to the rest of the year). Of these 'excess' deaths, 95% were of people aged over 65.

But Seán Moynihan stresses, "A variety of health problems have a hidden link to the cold. These conditions do not manifest symptoms until after the severe weather has passed and lead to strokes, hypothermia or respiratory illnesses such as bronchitis or pneumonia which are directly caused by the impact of the cold."

Moynihan continued, "We're very conscious that recent cuts and increases in fuel costs has put a lot of people in a difficult situation regarding heating their homes but the cold hurts the old more than anyone. It's vital that older people stay warm during the current weather conditions. The cold weather can be devastating for older people and we are calling on all members of the public to remember their older neighbours living alone, and to consider their needs. A call to an older neighbour or friend could make a huge difference. A five minute visit to check on heating levels, food consumption, adequate security, and simply to offer some human contact can have a profound effect. Don't leave it to others, they may have left it to you."

ALONE is currently engaged in a major Christmas awareness campaign to encourage the public to support their work during the Christmas period, and beyond. The campaign is entitled "Some of us need a hand", a reference to the one in ten older people in need of support with whom ALONE works.

Further information, including advice and tips for older people during the cold weather, can be found on www.alone.ie

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For further information, please contact Glenn Hogarty / Tara Carey, Limelight Communications on (01) 668 0600