

OLDER PERSONS CHARITY ALONE ADVISES CHECKING ON OLDER NEIGHBOURS DURING PREDICTED SEVERE COLD SNAP

Charity warns that extreme cold temperatures can have serious effects on health and wellbeing of many older people

Dublin, February 1st 2012

With a severe cold snap forecast by Met Eireann tonight, 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. ALONE also urges older persons who are concerned about their own wellbeing during the cold snap to ask for assistance and help when needed.

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE stressed “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 forecasted severe cold snap tonight and beyond. 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 five minute visit to check on heating levels in particular, but also food consumption, adequate security, and simply to offer some human contact can have a profound effect.”

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. 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.

Seán Moynihan stresses, "A variety of health problems have a hidden link to the cold weather. 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."

He continued, "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."

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

ENDS

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