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Holistic winter health: key messages for Londoners

Produced by UKHSA London with support from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, NHS London and Thrive LDN.

Background

Below are five key public health messages to focus on and share as Londoners enter a new year in the context of the cost-of-living crisis and NHS pressures. Now is an important time to remind ourselves of the things we can do to ensure that we continue through winter and into spring in good health.

This involves taking care of our health in the round by stopping the spread of winter illnesses, taking care of existing long-term health conditions, looking after both our mental and physical health and wellbeing, and supporting one another during this time.

Please embed these key messages in your regular communications as you see fit.

1. Stop the spread of winter illnesses

This winter, [flu](#), [COVID-19](#) and Strep A infections such as [scarlet fever](#), have been circulating at high levels, though levels of these infections are currently falling overall. However, winter isn't over yet and we need to guard against further surges of infection.

Vaccines

- Boost your immunity this winter with the COVID-19 booster and flu vaccine.
- Protection provided by COVID-19 vaccines decreases over time. So, if you're 50 or over, in an at-risk group or pregnant, boost your immunity now.
- Flu viruses can change every year, so for best protection you should get the flu vaccine every year if you are eligible.

Stop the spread of infection

There are things we can all do to help stop the spread of infections:

- Try to stay at home when unwell.
- Regular and thorough hand washing with soap and warm water for 20 seconds.
- Catching coughs and sneezes in a tissue and binning them, before washing your hands.
- If you are unwell but you do have to go out, wear a face covering. Don't visit healthcare settings or vulnerable people unless urgent.
- If your child is unwell and getting worse, trust your instincts. Get medical help if you think you need it.

2. Take care of your long-term conditions and use NHS services appropriately

If you're living with a long-term health condition such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular or respiratory disease, it's important to attend all your appointments and reviews, so your NHS care team can help you manage your condition.

- If your symptoms suddenly get worse or you develop new symptoms in-between check-ups, contact your GP or NHS care team.
- NHS screening services can detect a problem early, which can mean treatment is more effective. So, don't ignore your screening invite and if you missed your last one, book an appointment with your GP practice now.
- The NHS in London is working as quickly and safely as possible to see as many patients as we can. If you're waiting for an operation or procedure, the online [My Planned Care](#) service can give you advice and support while you wait and helps you to prepare for your hospital consultation, treatment or surgery.

There are a range of NHS services that you can help and advice from:

- **a pharmacy** – pharmacists can give treatment advice for a range of minor illnesses and can tell you if you need to see a doctor
- **your GP** – you may be able to speak to a GP online or over the phone, or go in for an appointment if they think you need to
- **NHS 111** – go to 111.nhs.uk or call 111 if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do
- **999** – call 999 in a medical or mental health emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.

3. Take care of your mental health and wellbeing

Many Londoners will be struggling with mental wellbeing this winter, especially due to the increased cost-of-living pressures. We know that when times are tough, it's important that we look after our own and each other's wellbeing.

[Getting Through This Together](#) is a collective campaign from [Thrive LDN](#) which aims to encourage Londoners to strengthen their social networks with family members and friends, and trusted others in their community, as well as highlighting the professional support and advice services which are available.

Key messages:

- **We can all do our bit to spread hope and kindness, and to help each other.**
 - Reaching out to someone could help them know that someone cares, that they are valued, and help them find the support they need.
- **When times are tough, it's normal to feel a bit worried, frustrated or overwhelmed.**
 - There are some simple things we can do to help keep ourselves well, and if you are finding it hard, support and advice services are there for you.
- **London is full of amazing people and communities who have come together during the most challenging of times.**
 - Many Londoners are speaking with family, friends, and trusted others in their community to support themselves through the emotional pressures felt through the cost-of-living crisis.

- **If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment.** It's important to know that support is available, even if services seem busy at the moment.

Helpful resources to signpost to:

- The [GLA's Help With the Cost of Living online hub](#) contains a range of information to support Londoners, including on money and mental health.
- [Good Thinking has a helpful guide for Londoners](#) who are worried about the cost of living, which includes tips to boost your mental health and stay positive.
- [Thrive LDN](#) is a citywide movement to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Londoners. It is supported by the Mayor of London and led by the London Health Board partners.
- [Every Mind Matters](#) gives expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental wellbeing and make them part of your daily routine.
- [Five ways to wellbeing](#) are steps that have been researched and developed to help improve wellbeing.
- [NHS talking therapies](#) are effective and confidential treatments delivered by fully trained and accredited NHS practitioners. They can help with common mental health problems like stress, anxiety and depression. You don't need a GP referral to use this service.
- If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment. [Find where to get urgent help for mental health.](#)

4. Get back on track with our physical health and wellbeing

As we start the new year, let's take the opportunity to get back on track and prioritise our health and wellbeing. Whether you want to lose weight, get active or quit smoking, there has never been a better time to kickstart your health.

Helpful resources to signpost to:

- [Better Health](#) contains lots of free tools and support to help you make healthy changes, whether it is losing weight, stopping smoking, getting active or drinking less.
- The [NHS Weight Loss Plan](#) can help you start healthier eating habits, be more active and start losing weight.
- [Couch to 5K and Active 10](#) are both programmes to help you get active, no matter how much you already do.
- [Stop Smoking London](#) provide support to Londoners to help you find the best way to succeed and stop smoking for good.
- The [NHS Quit Smoking](#) app can help you quit smoking and start breathing easier. If you can make it to 28 days smoke-free, you're 5 times more likely to quit for good.
- The [Drink Free Days](#) app can help you feel healthier, lose weight and save money by picking your days to go drink-free.

5. Look out for others as we go through tough times

Many of our family, friends and colleagues may be struggling as we go through the winter. It's important to check in with friends, family and community members to support each other and link those in need to relevant support and services when needed.

Thrive LDN's [Help Yourself and Others](#) is a space that brings together ideas, inspiration, and resources to help build resilience, improve wellbeing and to learn from community experiences.

Some tools and ideas that we know protect mental health, include:

- Social networks and connections
- Building personal resilience
- Self-care and physical care
- Connecting with nature
- Keeping active
- Creativity and wellbeing
- Volunteering
- Hearing from other Londoners

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