

Stay well and warm this winter

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To help spread the message, a partnership of local organisations including Cambridge University Hospitals, have joined forces to target people with long-term health conditions, people aged over 65, pregnant women and parents of children under five.

Winter conditions can be seriously bad for our health, particularly those at risk. The cold weather can increase the risk of raising blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. People with chest conditions are at particular at risk of becoming ill during periods of cold and damp weather, ice, snow and high winds. There are around 180 extra deaths every year in Cambridgeshire linked to the cold weather.

Dr Richard Miller, CUH deputy medical director, said:

“Each winter is more challenging but we have put in place a number of measures to ensure patients receive high-quality, safe care and are able to get home quicker.

“One of the patient groups most at risk during this time of year is the frail elderly, who are more prone and vulnerable to falls, as well as infections such as flu and norovirus.

“In the winter we see a higher proportion of these patients, many in their 90s and often confused and scared. Our A&E staff, geriatricians and nurses are skilled at caring for these vulnerable patients and getting them back on their feet but it is much better for them to keep well and warm and take precautions against falling ill in the first place.

“Infection control is one of the greatest challenges for hospitals like ours, especially in the winter. We have very good records on protecting patients from superbugs such as MRSA but we always have to be vigilant.

“We regularly remind all our staff, patients and visitors of the part they can play in helping to reduce infection by simply adopting good hand hygiene. This is the single most important aspect of infection control and will go a long way towards preventing outbreaks of both seasonal flu and norovirus throughout the Trust at this time of year.

“We are asking local people to help us keep the hospital running smoothly to ensure we have the beds and the staff available for when you need to be in hospital by following the Choose Well advice.”

As part of the local campaign, people who are eligible and receive a free flu jab will also receive a free information pack giving tips, recipes and helpful numbers. Local organisations, including charities, councils and not for profit organisations, can also apply for grants on behalf of people struggling to pay their fuel bills and keep their homes warm.

Val Thomas, Consultant in Public Health at Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "Cold weather can be dangerous to our health and we shouldn't take it lightly. These simple tips can help you keep warm and keep well this winter. We're also calling on people to look out for vulnerable relatives, friends and neighbours. Your help can make a difference even if it just seeing if they are okay or having a cup of tea with them."

Dr Richard Spiers, GP and prescribing clinical lead for the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), said: "On average, 40 per cent of GP appointments are for minor ailments and common conditions that could be treated with self-care at home. "Aches and pains, colds and flu and upset stomachs are generally not a serious health problem for many patients – and your local pharmacists have the knowledge and skills to advise you on the best treatment."