

News Release

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Caption: Alan McKinney, Western Trust lead clinician for emergency care and medicine, urges people to be aware of the risk of hypothermia. Mr McKinney is pictured with Joanne Doherty, Injury Prevention Officer, as they promote the 'Don't get caught out by the cold' advice cards.

Don't Get Caught Out By The Cold

The Western Health and Social Care Trust is urging people to be aware of the dangers of the cold weather as it has begun distributing cards with the message: 'Don't get caught out by the cold'.

The cards are being distributed through Western Trust Accident & Emergency (A&E) Departments at Altnagelvin Hospital, Erne Hospital and the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital.

Alan McKinney, A&E consultant and Western Trust lead clinician for emergency care and medicine, said people should be aware of the risks associated with the drop in temperatures.

Mr McKinney said: "Almost everyone knows about winter dangers such as the risk of broken bones from falls on icy steps, or streets.

“As well as urging the public to be vigilant on footpaths and to wear appropriate footwear in these weather conditions, I would like to remind people of the risks associated with hypothermia. Hypothermia occurs when a person's normal body temperature of around 37°C (98.6°F) drops below 35°C (95°F).

“Hypothermia is usually caused by being in a cold environment. It can be triggered by a combination of things, including prolonged exposure to cold - such as staying outdoors in cold conditions or in a poorly heated room for a long time - rain, wind, sweat, inactivity or being in cold water.

“Older people and those who are ill and unable to move around easily are especially vulnerable to hypothermia.

“People who spend a lot of time in extreme weather conditions, such as climbers and skiers, are at a higher risk of hypothermia, especially if they are not wearing suitable clothing. Babies are also more prone to hypothermia because their body's ability to regulate its temperature is not fully developed. They lose heat quickly if left in a cold room for too long.

“By keeping warm we would hope that people will be less susceptible to developing hypothermia and other health issues. We hope that the advice on our ‘Don't get caught out by the cold’ cards will help people to lessen the risk of developing hypothermia. It is also important for people to look in on their neighbours during this colder time of year.”

Joanne Doherty, Injury Prevention Officer in the A&E Department, has been involved in the production of the ‘Don't get caught out by the cold’ cards. Joanne said the cards, as well as acting as a gauge indicating the most suitable temperature in a room, provide useful advice on keeping warm.

Joanne said: “The advice is to dress warmly in layers of clothing, whether you are indoors or outside. Wear a hat, gloves and other cold weather gear. Keep

active, if possible, and eat a balanced diet. Remember that body temperature can fall from drinking alcohol, being sick or taking medication.”

ENDS

**For further information contact Western Health and Social Care Trust
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