



equinox

DRUGS AND EXTREME COLD WEATHER

Our climate is changing. In the UK, this means we are seeing more frequent bouts of severe weather.

Extreme cold weather is an average temperature of 2°C or less and/or ice and heavy snow. It can be unpredictable and severely affect your life.

If you take drugs to high levels or you are dependent on drugs, you need to take extra care of your health and wellbeing in extreme cold weather.

One way to adapt to climate change is to know how to look after yourself and others in the cold. Read our tips inside then identify your needs, such as adaptations to your home or routine, useful phone numbers and local support services.



Your health comes first

- Stay indoors in extreme cold weather, particularly after taking drugs.
- Always contact your doctor if you feel mentally or physically unwell. Drugs can affect your body temperature and how you perceive it. Drug use and hypothermia can affect you in similar ways – eg slurred or slow speech, tiredness, memory loss, shaking, numbness, changes to breathing, heart rate or blood pressure.
- If you can safely reduce drug use in extreme cold weather, do so with medical help.
- If you are dependent on drugs (particularly opiates or benzodiazepines), DO NOT stop taking drugs suddenly without medical help.
- Methadone / Subutex: if you are on daily supervised consumption and extreme cold weather affects your ability to access medication, speak to your prescriber immediately.
- Check storage conditions for prescribed medication – many advise to avoid damp, very cold places.
- If extreme cold stops you going to drug recovery groups, call peers for support.
- If you cannot avoid going out, watch out for ice, snow and wet surfaces – accidents are more likely in extreme cold, particularly after taking drugs.



Food and drink

- Stock up with long life food that is easy to make – dried / tinned food and frozen ready meals.
- Drink hot non-alcoholic fluids regularly, such as tea and soup.
- If your drug use varies across the day, make and consume food and non-alcoholic fluids at the best times for you – it's better to eat and drink when it suits you than not all.



Money matters

- Keep an emergency fund for unpredictable cold weather.
- If you receive benefits, find out about cold weather payments
- Reduce spend on drugs in extreme cold to pay for food, clothes, electricity, gas and phone.



Dress for warmth

- Layer clothing. Wear upper body layers with long sleeves. Wear tights / long johns under trousers. Double up socks.
- If you cannot avoid going outdoors, wear a waterproof top layer. Wear a hat, gloves, scarf and footwear with grip. If you get wet, change or dry yourself as soon as possible.



Keep warm indoors

- After washing in the morning, dry off completely in the bathroom and get dressed in the warmth.
 - Use blankets and central heating to keep warm indoors.
 - Block drafts from windows, doors and letterbox.
- If you have taken drugs::
- Take care using fan or gas heaters
 - Fill hot water bottles from the hot tap NOT the kettle
 - DO NOT take very hot baths or showers



If you are homeless

- DO NOT sleep out in extreme cold.
- Ask your outreach worker about shelters and food banks.
- Avoid taking drugs outdoors in extreme cold weather. Drugs impair your ability to judge body temperature accurately.



Keep in touch and informed

- Isolating in extreme cold can make you feel worse and lead to higher drug use. Keep in daily contact with friends, family and support workers.
- Turn on the TV or radio to find out weather reports.
- Look out for people who are vulnerable. Can you think of anyone who may need a supportive phone call or message?
- Find out about help to keep warm and well from community / faith groups.



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To keep yourself safe and well in extreme weather, check out the full series of advice leaflets from Equinox:

- Alcohol and extreme cold weather
- Alcohol and extreme hot weather
- Drugs and extreme cold weather
- Drugs and extreme hot weather
- Mental ill health and extreme cold weather
- Mental ill health and extreme hot weather

**To download and share electronic copies,
please visit: www.equinoxcare.org.uk/climate-change**

These guides have been developed by Equinox with funding from Defra. The content is based on the experiences of Equinox service users with expert guidance from Equinox medical professionals.