



Action for Warm Homes

Northern Ireland

Excess Winter Deaths

January 2019

NEA NI is an independent charity seeking to end fuel poverty through a range of activities including campaigning, policy development, practical programmes, training and advice. NEA has a network of offices throughout UK which also work to support deprived communities and low-income energy consumers.

The 2017-18 Excess Winter Deaths statistics released by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in December show an increase of 130% since 2015-16. The total number of excess winter deaths for 2017-18 were 1,500.

These figures are the highest since the major flu epidemic in 1989. Over 500 of these deaths will be directly attributable to living in a cold damp home¹. The vast majority will have multiple hospital and GP visits behind them.

The method used to calculate excess winter deaths defines the winter period as December to March and compares the number of deaths that occurred in this winter period, with the average number of non-winter deaths occurring in the preceding August to November, and the following April to July (NISRA).

Excess winter deaths are avoidable; however, they seem to have been accepted as part of winter. Rising energy prices, welfare cuts and stagnant wages are causing people to struggle more and more during the winter months. Additional support is needed to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported.

On top of these preventable deaths, we know that many more will have suffered the preventable health impacts of living in a cold and damp home, as well as resorting to harmful coping strategies detailed below.

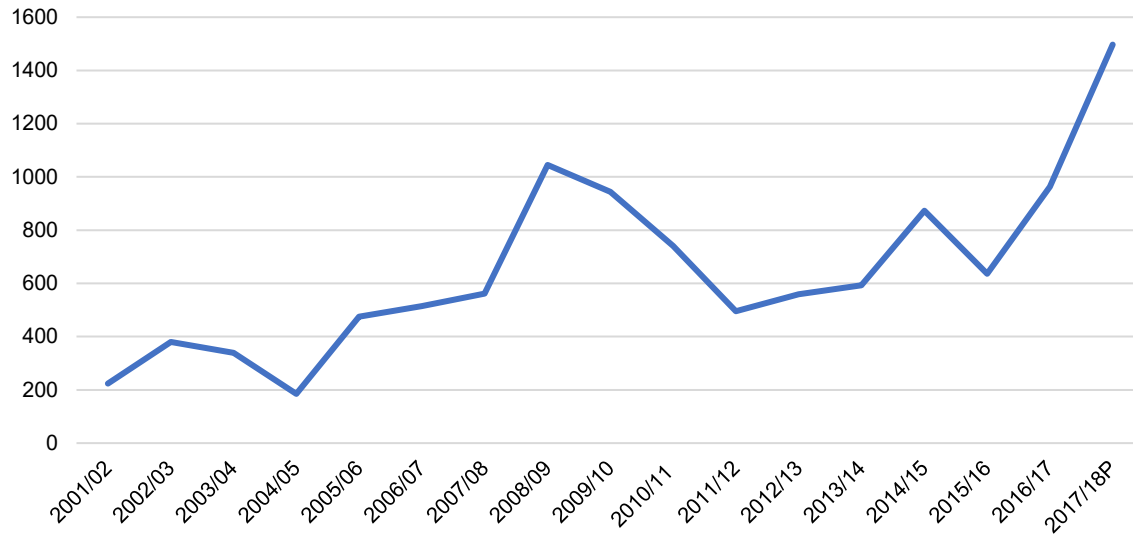
Breakdown of statistics

The charts below illustrate demographics and a timeline of previous excess winter deaths. Several variables affect these figures, the strongest correlation is between temperature and respiratory deaths.

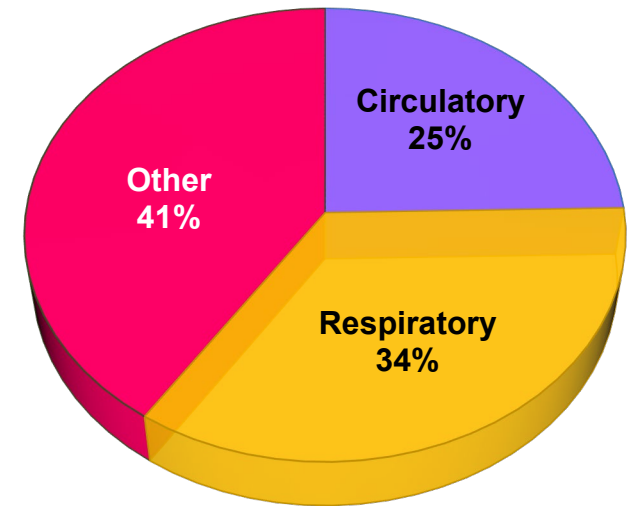
The figures demonstrate the need for urgent action and come after NEA launched the Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign, which aims to raise awareness of the annual devastation that cold homes wreak on the most vulnerable in our society, and focus on what more needs to be done to end fuel poverty and 'preventable' excess winter deaths and ill health.

¹ The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011) Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing: A method guide to the quantification of health effects of selected housing risks in the WHO European Region http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/142077/e95004.pdf

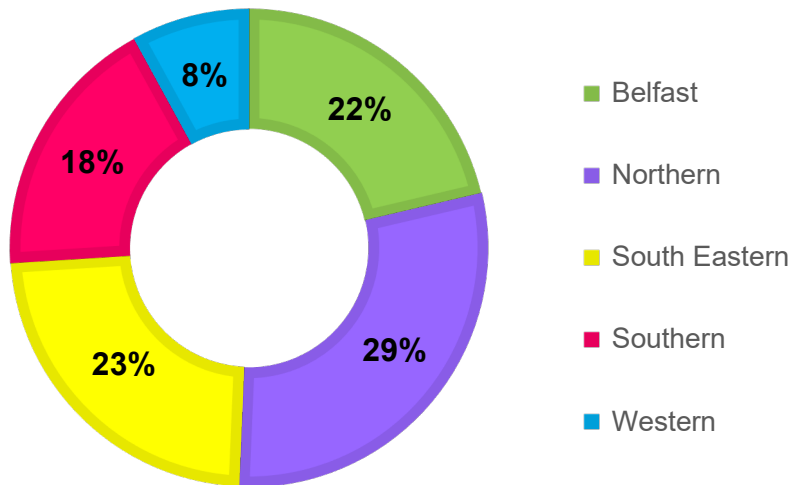
Excess Winter Mortality Northern Ireland 2001-18



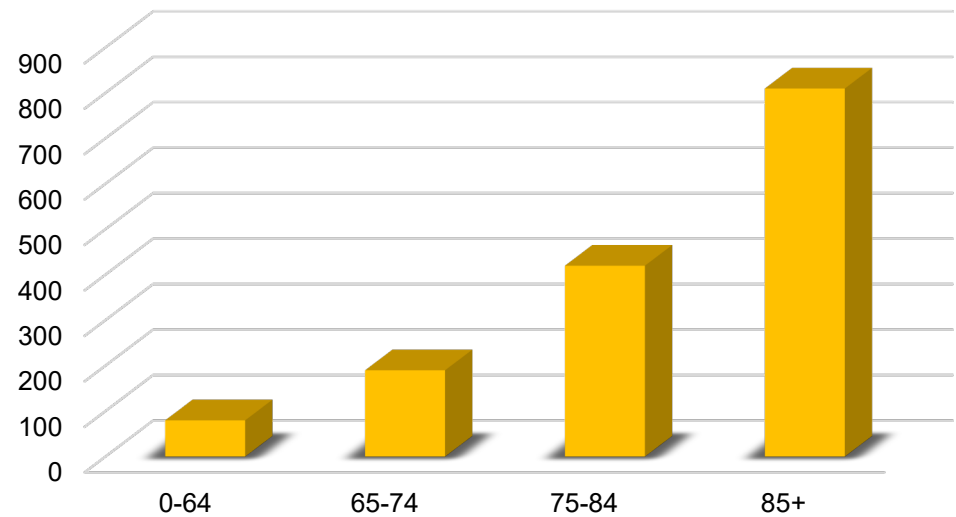
Cause of Death 2017-18



By Area: Health and Social Care Trust



By Age Group



Further Information

The Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign is NEA's annual winter initiative focusing on the need for people to be able to stay warm in their homes. Our aims are to raise awareness amongst both politicians and members of the public of the problem of fuel poverty and the action needed to be taken at a policy level; as well as the help and support available locally for those struggling to heat their homes. It also highlights key messages around gas and electricity safety in the home.

For more information about the WASH Campaign, visit: <https://www.nea.org.uk/campaigns-policy/wash-2018/>.

New evidence provided by NEA, has revealed the top 10 unsafe fuel poverty coping strategies being used to survive winter:

- ✚ Going to bed early to stay warm;
- ✚ using unsafe, un-serviced heating appliances or inappropriate devices like ovens to stay warm;
- ✚ only heating one room or avoiding using central heating at all;
- ✚ cutting back on electricity and using candles instead of lights;
- ✚ spending the day in heated public spaces or even A&E;
- ✚ leaving curtains closed all day or putting newspaper on windows;
- ✚ cooking, using alternative sources such as barbeque or portable stove;
- ✚ cutting back on essential personal items, food, eating only cold meals or reliance on food banks;
- ✚ not inviting friends or family in to the home; and
- ✚ formal or informal borrowing from friends and family.

Earlier this year we published the UK Fuel Poverty Monitor, amongst the findings relating to Northern Ireland, statistics showed an increase in Emergency Department admissions up 13% in the last 5 years and waiting times longer than 12 hours have increased.

Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK experienced a severely prolonged winter in 2018 with temperatures reaching -7°C.

Our recommendations in the UK Fuel Poverty Monitor were for:

- ✚ A comprehensive cold weather plan in Northern Ireland;
- ✚ Formal adoption of the NICE NG6 guidelines relating to cold-related ill health and excess winter deaths; and
- ✚ More accessible contingency funding for third sector frontline workers dealing with the most vulnerable.