

Keeping your staff safe this winter

A guide to workplace health and
safety through the colder months



As the colder months approach, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) face unique challenges in maintaining a safe and healthy working environment.



From icy pavements to seasonal illnesses, winter brings risks that can impact both productivity and wellbeing. This guide offers practical steps to help you prepare your workplace and support your staff throughout the winter season.

The H&S Dept is here to support you in keeping your staff healthy and safe during the colder months. Below are six key areas you need to look out for, and at the bottom you will find a five point checklist to help you prepare to winter safely.

Managing cold weather risks

One of the most immediate concerns during winter is the drop in temperature. Ensuring your workplace is adequately heated and insulated is essential. This is not just for comfort, but for safety. Portable heaters can be useful, but they must be properly maintained and PAT tested to avoid fire hazards. Encourage staff to report any cold spots or heating issues promptly.

Slips, trips and falls are among the most common winter accidents. Gritting outdoor areas such as car parks, walkways and entrances should be part of your daily routine. Indoors, consider placing anti-slip mats near entrances and ensure wet floors are clearly marked.

Good lighting is also crucial, especially during darker mornings and evenings. You should check that all outdoor and indoor lighting is functioning and sufficient.

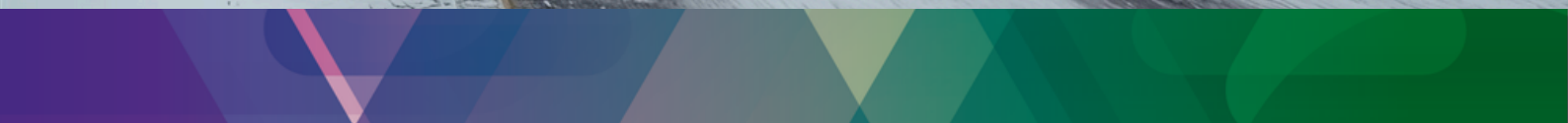
Appropriate clothing and equipment

For staff working outdoors or in unheated environments, suitable clothing is vital. Provide warm, waterproof gear including gloves, hats, and thermal socks. Encourage layering and ensure that any personal protective equipment (PPE) is appropriate for winter conditions - for example, footwear with good grip to prevent slipping.

Safe travel and vehicle use

If your business relies on vehicles, winter maintenance is non-negotiable. Check tyres, batteries, antifreeze levels, and ensure windscreen wipers are in good condition. Consider issuing emergency kits for company vehicles, including blankets, torches, and first aid supplies.

It's also wise to review your travel policies. Allow extra time for journeys, encourage safe driving practices, and be flexible with remote working arrangements when severe weather makes commuting unsafe.



Supporting employee health

Winter doesn't just affect physical safety; it can also take a toll on mental and emotional wellbeing. Shorter days, colder weather, and seasonal illnesses can all contribute to stress and fatigue. Supporting your team's health is not only compassionate - it's good business. It will lead to increased productivity and decreased absence.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and general winter blues are common. Encourage open conversations about mental health and share resources that offer support. Consider flexible working hours or remote work options to help staff manage their energy and mood. Even small changes, like allowing more natural light into the workspace, can make a big difference.

Promoting healthy habits

Help your team stay healthy by providing warm drinks and nutritious snacks in break areas. Encourage regular movement and breaks, especially for desk-based staff. Sharing NHS guidance on flu prevention and promoting flu vaccinations can also reduce absenteeism and protect vulnerable employees








Promoting healthy habits

Winter is peak season for colds, flu, and other respiratory illnesses. Reinforce hygiene practices by ensuring handwashing facilities are well-stocked and placing hand sanitiser stations throughout the workplace. Increase the frequency of cleaning routines, especially in shared spaces.

Review your sick leave policies to ensure they encourage staff to stay home when unwell, rather than risk spreading illness. Clear communication about expectations and support available can help staff feel confident in making the right decisions.

Your winter safety checklist

-  Conduct and/or update risk assessments to identify any winter hazards in your workplace.
-  Brief your staff on seasonal safety procedures, to ensure they understand their role.
-  Review and update your emergency contacts and protocols so that they are fit for purpose.
-  Inspect your heating and lighting systems and fix or replace any faulty parts as necessary.
-  Issue your employees with appropriate PPE and winter clothing where required.

Need support?

The H&S Dept is here to help. Whether you need assistance updating your risk assessments, training your staff, or reviewing your policies, our advisors are ready to support you through the winter season.

0345 872 3639

info@hsdept.co.uk

