



# NHS North East London – Severe weather system response

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Review of summer 2022 and future actions to address severe weather

# Context

- Severe weather presents a multitude of risks to the health of patients and the provision of healthcare.
- The main risks to the NHS and to patients during severe weather are a) significant increase of activity with patients suffering ill health or death due to heat, b) estates issues relating to overheating of equipment, c) safety of patients throughout clinical settings and d) safety of staff.
- The NHS must work with its health and social care partners to respond to the risks posed as a result of severe weather. This includes planning for severe weather, responding to severe weather, and ensuring that there is an ongoing learning process to incorporate actions and outcomes.
- The National Heatwave Plan 2022 outlines that the climate is changing and the current analysis in the national UK climate change risk assessment suggests that summers will progressively get hotter. Services across the nation must ensure that they are equipped to respond to heatwaves and do their part to reduce climate change where possible.

# NHS EPRR planning

- Under the NHS EPRR (Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response) Framework 2022 and the Civil Contingences Act 2004, NHS organisations are required to plan for a variety of incidents and scenarios that could potentially impact the provision of services to patients.
- Planning for such incidents must take in to account the specifications as noted in the CCA 2004, the Health and Safety Act 1974, the Health and Social Care Act 2022 and other supporting documents. In addition, NHS organisations must adhere to national guidance, plans and best practice and incorporate these in to their plans. An NHS organisation's approach is assessed by NHS England in a yearly assurance process whereby a compliancy rating is given.
- Each NHS organisation will have its own plan which governs its response to incidents and their causes. An overarching incident response plan will be supported by items such as a) business continuity for estates and facilities, IT infrastructures, wards and whole sites, b) severe weather which must cover floods, cold and hot weather, and c) pandemic plans.
- It is important to note that each NHS organisation is a statutory body, and is therefore responsible for their individual planning approach. However, there is a requirement for NHS organisations to plan and act in a multi-agency way with other frontline responders and Borough partners, and all plans must be shared and reviewed by stakeholders to ensure that health and social care services are coordinated in response.

# Severe weather planning overview

- The North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB) currently collate cold and hot weather plans in to one plan, entitled the Severe Weather Plan.
- The Severe Weather Plan is based off of new guidance (such as the Heatwave Plan) and is reviewed yearly in order to ensure that it is current and reflective of new ways of working and best practice. The plan was last reviewed in June and is currently in the process of another review after the ICBs assurance meeting with NHS England.
- Trusts also have a Severe Weather Plan (sometimes split between a hot and cold weather plan), which governs their response to severe weather. All severe weather plans must be in line with the latest heatwave and cold weather guidance.
- Multi-agency planning for events such as heatwaves are required to take place at the Borough Resilience Forum, which in Barking and Dagenham is led by Barking and Dagenham Council (LBBD).
- LBBD hold exercises yearly on a number of issues in order to test multi-agency arrangements. The ICB will also lead ICS-level incident exercises to test arrangements across a NEL footprint. The first to take place was a nationally mandated exercise in December 2022, which incorporated severe weather (snow). The ICB will be leading an exercise in April 2023 (topic TBC).

# What the NEL Severe Weather Plan covers

The NEL severe weather plan, currently under review, covers:

- Risk assessment for patients and services;
- Nationally identified patient groups at risk;
- Level of response required per Alert level, plus any supporting actions;
- Command and Control arrangements;
- Communications and Media guidance including ICB-led cascades;
- Managing Excess Deaths guidance;
- Data sharing and intelligence gathering;
- Training Requirements; and
- Testing Requirements (also covered by the NHS NEL EPRR Policy).

The above stipulations are all required as per the National Heatwave Plan 2022.

# 2022 summer – record temperatures

- The UK experienced a brief but unprecedented extreme heatwave from 16 to 19 July 2022, reaching heights of 40C. The Met Office issued its first red warning for extreme heat and the UK Health Security Agency issued a level 4 alert. This resulted in the Government declaring a national emergency.
- The NHS prepared for the heatwave by invoking their severe weather plans and reviewing their business continuity arrangements. Trusts also reviewed their estates risk assessments to understand potential issues which could arise (such as roof-top generators breaking down) and prepared for an increase in patients or acuity challenges. Trusts were required to 'report by exception' issues relating to the heatwave and advise of potential risk to NHS services, including estates, staff, supply chain and patient safety. The ICB stood up Incident Management meetings with Directors on Call.
- NHS England released a communications package for ICBs to cascade to frontline providers (including Primary Care). This communications package outlined staff communications and public health messaging regarding keeping cool. Communication leads worked with their local authority counterparts to reiterate local public health messaging.
- London Boroughs stood up additional BRFs (Borough Resilience Forums) or Tactical coordination groups in order to respond to the heatwave or incidents caused by hot weather such as fires. These were joined by the Director on Call.
- A number of fires broke out across London, including in Barking & Dagenham and Havering. Rest centres stood up by LBBD as part of the response required enhanced support from healthcare colleagues, which was provided by North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT) and local primary care services (including mental health support, prescriptions and general healthcare needs). There were limited casualties to the fires and few patients were conveyed to hospital.

# NHS learning from summer 2022 heatwave

Trusts followed their heatwave plans, resulting in NHS services remaining resilient. There were no NHS organisations who reported issues regarding the impacts of heat (on patients, staff or facilities). However, there were a number of lessons learnt due to the response to fires regarding multi-agency working. This included:

1. **Establishing a silver on-call rota for North East London;**
2. **Ensuring emergency preparedness cascades are followed;**
3. **Ensuring all levels of ICB management are trained in Emergency Response;**
4. **Health to run ICS-level and Borough-level exercises, created with advice/support from Local Authority Resilience Leads;**
5. **Ensure widespread understanding of the ICBs new evacuation plan; and**
6. **Joint planning between the ICBs Climate/Green Team and EPRR.**

# 2023 Heatwave Planning

The ICBs Severe Weather Plan already incorporates the requirements of the national Heatwave Plan in 2022. However, there are a number of areas that the ICB is working on to ensure that it is satisfied with the system response for health. These include:

- The long-term goal of adapting and reducing the impact of climate change to the NHS in NEL. This requires working together across the system in incident teams, Green Teams and facilities teams to address issues which the NHS faces. Engagement with these groups, which will be conducted via several routes – the NHS Green Team Working Group (all partners), ICBs Resilience Group (ICB Leads) and the NHS NEL Resilience Forum (all NHS NEL stakeholders with an interest in resilience);
- Improving the understanding of level of vulnerable patients in the community, noting that many stakeholders hold similar but differing lists (Housing Association, Council, NHS Primary Care and NHS Trusts);
- Ensuring that all organisations going through the procurement process have their climate and resilience plans reviewed, with a direct link to seek support and information from the NEL ICB EPRR Team;
- Ensure that there is appropriate planning in place and enhanced support for non-NHS settings, such as care homes;
- Reviewing the resilience of primary care and community service estates (both currently and long-term);
- Continuing to review all plans on an annual basis to incorporate new guidance and best practice;
- Ensuring the above areas are underpinned by strategies such as the Greener NHS Plan, the NHS EPRR Framework and the NHS NEL Estates strategy; and
- Promote the heatwave plan and its requirements with new staff and leadership, and ensure continuous engagement with the plan outside of EPRR and Climate teams.



# For more information

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