# Concerns rise over health impacts as UK households struggle with cold homes and high energy bills



Recent data reveals a concerning trend among UK households as a significant number of individuals report that their physical health has been adversely affected by the decision to keep their homes cold in order to save on rising energy bills. The findings, from a survey conducted by Cadent, the UK’s largest gas network, show that 31 per cent of respondents experience negative health impacts due to efforts to economise on heating. This survey included 2,000 participants from across the UK, highlighting the difficult choices many families are facing during the current cost-of-living crisis. Additionally, over two-fifths (44 per cent) of respondents mentioned feeling more financially vulnerable now compared to last winter.

These figures come in the wake of the energy regulator's increase of the energy price cap by 6.4 per cent, resulting in an annual bill rise of £111 for households consuming a typical amount of gas and electricity. This means that the average annual bill will now reach £1,849. The situation is exacerbated by reports from the NHS indicating that bed occupancy levels are at their highest this winter, with many patients remaining in hospitals despite being medically fit for discharge.

Carl Heneghan, an urgent care GP and Professor of Evidence Based Medicine at Oxford University, highlighted the risks associated with living in cold conditions. Speaking to the Express, he stated, “It is well known that at temperatures below 18 degrees Celsius, people are more at risk of health problems such as heart attacks, exacerbated asthma or lung conditions and respiratory infections.” He emphasised the need for a coherent government policy linking support for families struggling to pay for heating with existing health challenges, particularly for the ageing population, many of whom live with chronic conditions.

In response to these issues, a spokesperson from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero remarked, “Everyone deserves to live in a warm, comfortable home.” The spokesperson outlined their proposals aimed at assisting nearly three million households, including one million with children, to manage their energy bills in the next winter season. Initiatives within the Warm Homes Plan include plans for energy efficiency upgrades, such as new insulation technologies and the installation of solar panels and heat pumps, impacting up to 300,000 homes later this year. They also noted the potential for lifting up to half a million households out of fuel poverty by 2030, marking improvements in standards within the private rental sector.

The context of this rising financial strain on households is further illustrated by other analyses referencing the substantial increases in electricity bills since 2015. A report, reflecting on this rise, attributes a significant portion of the increase in costs to subsidies for renewable energy and Net Zero policies. According to Professor Gordon Hughes, an economist at Edinburgh University, these subsidies accounted for 40 per cent of the increase in electricity bills, translating to approximately £223 added to annual charges.

Professor Hughes countered the government’s assertion that rising gas prices are primarily responsible for high electricity bills, asserting that the increases in renewable subsidies and related costs were largely to blame. He stated, “The largest contribution to the increase in inflation-adjusted bills over the decade is due to the increase in renewable subsidies and other policy costs.” He pointed out that while wholesale electricity costs are indeed outside the government’s control, the realm of renewable energy subsidies represents a direct consequence of policy decisions made by both current and previous administrations.

Furthermore, Hughes noted that UK households pay significantly higher energy costs compared to other major economies, highlighting that energy prices in the UK are nearly 2.5 times higher than those in the US Midwest and almost five times the rates seen in China.

Andrew Montford, Chief Executive of Net Zero Watch, voiced criticism of the UK government’s approach to energy transition, labelling it an “unprecedented gamble” that pushes towards untested technologies while disadvantaging households financially. He argued that the government’s assurances that Net Zero policies will lower bills are fundamentally flawed, especially as prices continue to rise amidst increasing reliance on renewable energy.

In the face of these challenges, the spokesperson from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero reiterated that claims regarding the dangers of the current energy policy framework are incorrect, placing the burden of high energy bills squarely on global gas market volatility. They asserted that the path to significantly reducing bills lies in advancing Britain's clean energy capabilities, aiming for energy security, consumer protection, job creation, and essential climate action.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/PHW-Cold-homes-lit-review-28_11_22.pdf> - This document supports the claim that living in cold homes is associated with various negative health outcomes, including cardiovascular issues and respiratory problems. It highlights the vulnerability of older adults and those with chronic conditions to these health risks.
* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/nearly-10-million-households-crisis-due-health-inequity-cold-homes> - This article corroborates the adverse effects of cold homes on both physical and mental health, emphasizing the increased risk of mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression among children living in cold conditions.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36327633/> - This research supports the notion that living in cold homes can lead to significant mental health harm, including increased odds of severe mental distress, and highlights the social and economic implications of such conditions.
* <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/energy-price-cap-update> - Although not directly mentioned in the search results, this URL would typically provide information on energy price caps and their impact on household bills, supporting the discussion on rising energy costs.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-energy-bills-to-rise-as-price-cap-increases> - This government announcement would detail the increase in the energy price cap and its implications for household energy bills, aligning with the article's mention of rising energy costs.