



# Fire Safety Briefing

A third of people that die in fires every year receive care or support whether that is from a family member, friend or formal care staff.<sup>1</sup>

All public sector organisations have a duty under the Care Act 2014 to work effectively and in partnership to ensure that adults can continue living independently in their own home for as long as possible. There are some steps we can all take to support people we work with to reduce the risk of fire and be safer in their homes.

Safe and Well visits from [Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#) can be requested by anyone. All professionals can refer people for advice on fire safety. To make a referral click on this [link](#) on HCC website.

## People who may need more help

Everyone can benefit from fire safety advice but some groups may be at greater risk. Homes of older people, people with disabilities, those with visual and hearing impairments, and people using drugs or alcohol may need greater consideration when it comes to fire safety. There are four key reasons why:

- They may not be able to respond to a fire as quickly
- They may not be able to escape a fire
- They may be more at risk due to health needs or lifestyle factors
- They may use healthcare equipment such as oxygen or emollient creams that are flammable

## Risk factors to consider

### Smoking

Our safeguarding adults reviews (SARs) highlighted the fatal incidents from fires caused by smoking. Whilst practitioners worked hard in all cases to support the concerned adults, fire safety was peripheral and not given the attention it required. When working with smokers look out for the following signs:

- Burns on carpets, furniture, bedding and clothing
- Evidence of smoking in bed
- Discarded cigarettes or matches
- Overflowing ashtrays
- Lighters or matches within the reach of children

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<sup>1</sup> London Fire Brigade [Fire safety for carers, social workers and support workers | London Fire Brigade \(london-fire.gov.uk\)](#)

Dropped cigarettes and overflowing ashtrays can indicate high risk. If the person is not very mobile and tends to smoke where they sleep that risk is compounded.

If they need emollient creams, talk to their GP or pharmacist about using a non-flammable alternative, and putting in control measures such as fire-retardant bedding and clothing.

Vaping is safer than smoking so it may be worth suggesting as an alternative. A lit cigarette dropped on a bed or a chair can quickly cause a fatal fire but a vape won't.

Fire and Rescue Service colleagues can have these discussions if you refer the person (with their consent) for a [Safe and Well visit](#).

### Support for people who have a lot of belongings

Some people collect and hoard things in their home, leading to an increased risk of fire. There can be excessive number of belongings resulting in clutter blocking escape routes. Hoarded materials can easily catch alight if they come into contact with heat sources such as overloaded extension leads, the kitchen hob or naked flames like candles or cigarettes. Fires can also spread much faster, especially where there are flammable items such as newspapers or cardboard.

A [video](#) from London Fire Brigade talks about support for people who hoard.

Fire safety suggestions:

- Discouraging the use of light candles or tea lights of any kind. A safer option is to use LED flameless candles
- Discouraging the use of portable heaters, candles or gas hobs to heat the home. If using portable heaters, ensuring that items aren't placed on top of, or too close to them
- If possible suggesting smoking outside if they are a smoker, never smoking in bed or where they could fall asleep, and that they use proper ashtrays
- Sensitively discussing clearing out some clutter
- Working with them to develop the escape plan
- Making a referral for a [Safe and Well visit](#) (with their consent)

### Specialist health equipment

Specialist health equipment such as oxygen therapy, pressure mattresses or incontinence products can pose a fire hazard.

Oxygen therapy is used by people with respiratory problems. The presence of concentrated oxygen in cylinders greatly will increase the intensity of a fire if one starts.

Pressure relieving mattresses predominantly used by people who receive care in bed are used to prevent and treat pressure sores. When punctured by any heat source the escaping air can cause a fire to spread rapidly. The emergency backup battery may also continue to pump air, which can cause the fire to burn longer and with greater intensity.

Incontinence products are often supplied in large quantities to people who have continence problems. They contain plastics and other chemicals, in addition to paper or textile padding which provide additional fuel to a developing fire.

Safety advice:

- Never smoke when oxygen equipment is on or near airflow mattresses
- Turn off oxygen when equipment is not in use
- Electric blankets are not to be used on airflow mattresses
- Keep fires and heaters away from airflow mattresses
- Always store incontinence products safely away from anything that has a flame or is likely to get hot, for example heaters, candles, fires, chargers and other electrical appliances
- Try not to store incontinence supplies all in one place – ideally not next to the person’s bed or chair
- Refer for expert advice from [Safe and Well](#)

### Emollient skin creams

Emollients and skin creams are an important and effective treatment used to prevent or treat dry skin conditions like:

- Eczema
- Bed sores
- Ulcers
- Psoriasis

Emollients and skin creams alone are not flammable. However, a build-up of emollient/skin cream residue (even from just one application) on fabrics such as bedding, clothing and dressings, can increase flammability. These are especially a fire safety concern when used by people who spend extended periods in bed or armchair due to illness or limited mobility.

If you think the person is at increased fire risk, please speak with their GP or pharmacist to obtain a less flammable alternative to emollient creams.

### Restricted mobility

If the person is cared for in bed or spends most of their time in a chair, they are particularly at risk. Consider their needs and make sure appropriate measures are taken so they can safely escape if there is a fire. Refer them to [Safe and Well](#) for expert advice.

## When someone prefers to self-refer

Some people prefer to make their own referrals. If this is the case, people can self-refer via [HFSC \(safelincs.co.uk\)](https://safelincs.co.uk)

## Fire Safety Check List

Some behaviours at home can increase fire risk. Have a look around and take note of:

- Smoking – unsafe practice for example smoking in bed, unsafe disposal of cigarettes, burn or scorch marks on clothing, flooring or furniture
- Use of emollient creams (lotions, creams or gels that are used to prevent dry skin)
- Use of air pressure mattress or oxygen cylinders

- Unsafe use of heaters for example placed too close to furniture or other items that can catch fire
- Unsafe cooking habits for example cooking left unattended
- Overloaded electrical sockets/adaptors or extension leads
- Faulty or damaged wiring
- Electric blankets
- Previous fires or signs of near misses
- Unsafe candle/tea light use for example left too close to curtains or other items that could catch fire or within easy reach of children or pets

### Ability to react to fire or fire alarm

There are some factors that can affect the ability to respond to fire or fire alarm

- Cognitive impairment
- Use of medications that can cause drowsiness
- Alcohol dependency or use of drugs

### Reduced ability to escape

There can be factors preventing people to escape quickly when there is fire

- Limited mobility or tendency to falls
- Lacking capacity to understand what to do in case of fire
- Hoarding, particularly when escape routes are cluttered or obstructed
- People who are not mobile and remain in bed or chair
- People who may be unable to unlock/open doors

### Smoke and heat alarms

Smoke alarms should be fitted in all rooms except kitchen and bathroom. There should be heat alarm in kitchen. Smoke alarms can be provided free of charge during a Safe and Well visit.

### Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms should be fitted in all rooms where there are heaters such as gas, paraffin, solid fuel or a source of gas ignition.

## Resources

Fire Safety in the Home booklet



Safe and Well A4  
large print 2020 - V11

[Means of escape for disabled people leaflet](#)

[Home Fire Safety Advice \(PDF 296KB\)](#) – leaflet for professionals

Advice for people who hoard [video](#)