

Cold homes cost lives

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Cold homes cost lives and harm the environment, according to a *BMJ* editorial published today to coincide with a report commissioned by Friends of the Earth and written by Professor Sir Michael Marmot.

The report highlights that every year in the UK there are around 5,500 more deaths in the coldest quarter of houses, than would occur if those houses were warm.

The authors, Dr Keith Dear and Professor Anthony McMichael from the Australian National University in Canberra say Marmot's report identifies three gains that could be achieved by improving the insulation in British homes. These are saving lives, protecting the environment and reducing [health inequalities](#).

While elderly people living in cold homes are more prone to heart and [lung disease](#), cold homes can affect health at any age, say the authors. Children are more likely to suffer from breathing problems and [adolescents](#) living in a cold house have an increased risk of [mental health problems](#).

Dear and McMichael highlight that there are more winter deaths in countries with less severe and milder winter climates. This is because in very cold countries, such as Finland and Sweden, building standards have already been improved. Yet the problem in the UK remains severe, they say.

Taking action on cold homes, say the authors, is a win-win scenario.

While saving lives and improving health, governments would also be tackling climate change.

The authors conclude that Britain "is saddled with obsolete housing stock many decades, if not centuries, old ... these inadequate homes are a waste of energy, a [health](#) hazard, and (given today's levels of national wealth) a shameful relic for their part in fostering persistent, avoidable, social inequity." They call on governments to "heed the call in this timely report."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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