North West: 2026-27 El Nino checklist

Last reviewed: 2 Nov 2026 · Peak risk window: Nov-Feb · 71 actions

In an emergency, or if life is at risk, call 999 (or 112). Follow the advice of your local council, the emergency services and official flood and weather warnings. They override this checklist.

Water and food

- [ ] **Store 3 days' supply of bottled drinking water for the household**
  Power cuts and flooding can interrupt supply; British Red Cross home kit specifies 3 days of water
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£20 | Qty (family of 4): 36 litres: 3 litres per person per day for 3 days, plus extra for cooking, washing, babies and pets
  redcross.org.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **Stock long-life or ready-to-eat food and a tin opener**
  Cooking may be impossible in a power cut; Red Cross kit lists ready-to-eat food and tin opener
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£40 | Qty (family of 4): 3 days of long-life or ready-to-eat food for 4 (e.g. tinned meat, fruit, vegetables)
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **During a power cut keep fridge and freezer doors closed; monitor fridge temperature and follow FSA food-disposal guidance**
  FSA estimates a closed fridge stays cold for up to 4 hours; a full freezer stays frozen for up to 48 hours or 24 hours if half full. Refrigerated perishables reaching 8°C or above need the FSA four-hour handling rule
  When: during any power cut
  gov.uk

- [ ] **Keep a modest extra store of non-perishables and plan for family and pet dietary needs**
  Red Cross: about 50% of UK food is imported, so weather abroad may add pressure on supply and prices; the size of the effect is uncertain
  When: This month | Cost: £10-£30 | Qty (family of 4): optional; no source figure
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **After a flood or supply problem do not use tap water if its colour, taste or smell has changed; contact your water company**
  gov.uk after-flood advice
  When: after any flood
  gov.uk

- [ ] **If your home is affected by floodwater, discard food in non-waterproof, porous or damaged packaging, including screwcap, snap-lid and pull-top containers; wash intact water-resistant packaging before opening**
  Floodwater can contaminate food. If a fridge or freezer contacted floodwater, discard its food and do not restart the appliance until checked safe; use separate FSA guidance for power cuts
  When: after flooding affects your home or food storage
  gov.uk

Power, heat and light

- [ ] **Buy battery-powered or wind-up torches with spare batteries; avoid candles**
  Torches are safer than candles in power cuts (fire risk)
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£25 | Qty (family of 4): 1 per adult + 1 spare; spare batteries
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Fit a carbon monoxide alarm in each room containing a gas, oil, coal or wood-burning appliance**
  Carbon monoxide has no smell; faulty or poorly maintained fuel-burning appliances can produce it
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £10-£30 per alarm | Qty (family of 4): 1 per room containing a fuel-burning appliance
  nhs.uk

- [ ] **Never use a barbecue or camping stove indoors or inside a tent, and never run a generator or other engine indoors or in an enclosed space such as a garage or shed**
  NHS lists generators, barbecues and engines running in enclosed spaces as carbon monoxide sources. If you smell gas or a CO alarm sounds, call the Gas Emergency line on 0800 111 999 (free, 24 hours).
  When: before the first power cut
  nhs.uk

- [ ] **Keep blankets and warm layers accessible; try to heat frequently used rooms to at least 18°C**
  Power cuts can stop heating; government advice recommends layered clothing and keeping frequently used rooms at least 18°C
  When: This month | Cost: £15-£60 | Qty (family of 4): 1 blanket or sleeping bag per person
  beready.campaign.gov.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **Write down 105 (free to call, for power cuts) and keep a paper copy of key numbers**
  Red Cross power-cut page: write down important phone numbers including 105 and keep a paper copy in case your phone battery runs out; gov.uk help-during-flood: report a power cut on 105, calls are free.
  When: This fortnight
  gov.uk ; redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **For suspected carbon monoxide poisoning go outside and seek medical advice; call 999 or go to A&E for breathing difficulty, sudden confusion, unconsciousness, weakness, or chest or muscle pain; do not drive yourself or re-enter before advice**
  NHS 111 advises on suspected symptoms. If a gas appliance may be leaking carbon monoxide, call the Gas Emergency line on 0800 111 999 (free, 24 hours).
  When: learn before a power cut; act immediately if exposure is suspected
  nhs.uk

Flood and storm protection

- [ ] **Check your area's long-term flood risk from rivers, sea, surface water, reservoirs and groundwater where data is available**
  The service describes area-level flood risk and management options; it does not predict whether an individual property will flood
  When: Now
  gov.uk

- [ ] **Complete a personal flood plan and keep it with essentials**
  Official checklists for what to do before, during and after a flood
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 per household
  gov.uk

- [ ] **Buy flood protection before you need it. Do not count on council sandbags: Cumberland does not hand them out, and Lancashire has only a few, under conditions**
  Council sandbag availability is not guaranteed; Westmorland and Furness identifies gel flood sacks and property-level measures as preparation options
  When: This month | Cost: £30-£300+ (small measures; installation may cost more) | Qty (family of 4): Property-specific quantity following assessment
  cumberland.gov.uk ; westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk ; lancashire.gov.uk

- [ ] **Ask about non-return valves on drains, self-closing air bricks and raising sockets**
  Cuts water entering through drains and walls; listed on gov.uk protect-your-property
  When: This month | Cost: quotes vary | Qty (family of 4): per property survey
  gov.uk

- [ ] **Report blocked road drains and gullies to the responsible council**
  Cumberland Council: there is a large network of drains and gullies across Cumbria, which sometimes become blocked and flood the road; report online.
  When: within 2 weeks; report blockages when noticed
  cumberland.gov.uk

- [ ] **Before a storm: secure ladders, trampolines and garden furniture, park away from trees and walls, close windows and doors**
  Greater Manchester Resilience: storms can cause power cuts, fallen trees and travel disruption. The Met Office 3-month outlook (26 Oct 2026) says windy weather and storms are more likely than usual this winter; El Niño alone does not decide the weather.
  When: before each yellow/amber wind warning
  greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk ; metoffice.gov.uk

- [ ] **Sign up for free Environment Agency flood warnings if your home is at risk**
  Messages cover flooding from rivers, the sea or groundwater depending on your area; you cannot get flood warnings for surface water flooding (flash flooding).
  When: now; follow warnings whenever issued
  gov.uk

- [ ] **Never walk, cycle or drive through floodwater**
  Floodwater can be deeper than it looks and can hide open manholes, sharp objects and sewage. If you reach a flooded road, turn around and find another route. Driving through floodwater is the number one cause of death in floods.
  When: every flood event
  gov.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **When a flood warning is issued, move family, pets, cars and important items upstairs or to higher ground; leave if you are told to evacuate**
  Be Ready: not evacuating or delaying evacuation can put your life at risk; pack a grab bag of essentials in advance
  When: when a flood warning is issued | Cost: £0-£20 (use a spare bag) | Qty (family of 4): 1 grab bag per household
  beready.campaign.gov.uk

Home preparation

- [ ] **Take photographs around your home when a flood warning is issued (Red Cross: "may help with insurance claims")**
  Photos support insurance claims
  When: This fortnight
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Learn where to turn off electricity, gas and water, and show the family**
  Switch off electricity at the fuse box and water/gas at the mains if flooded and safe to do so
  When: Now
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Move valuables and keepsakes upstairs or to high shelves; keep documents in waterproof bags**
  Reduces loss in ground-floor flooding
  When: This month | Cost: £5-£20 | Qty (family of 4): as needed
  greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

- [ ] **Test smoke alarms regularly (monthly) and fit at least one on each floor**
  Fire risk rises with improvised heating and lighting in power cuts; fire and rescue services advise testing by pressing the test button every month
  When: monthly through the winter | Cost: £8-£25 if replacing | Qty (family of 4): At least 1 per floor
  lancsfirerescue.org.uk ; cambsfire.gov.uk

- [ ] **After a flood do not turn electricity, gas or water back on until your utilities company or a qualified engineer has checked them; never touch an electrical switch while standing in water**
  gov.uk after-flood and help-during-flood advice
  When: after any flood | Cost: free (engineer check may cost)
  gov.uk ; gov.uk

- [ ] **When cleaning up after a flood wear rubber boots, waterproof gloves and a plastic apron, wash hands with soap after each session, never run petrol or diesel generators or other fuel-driven equipment indoors, and ventilate heaters and dryers**
  UKHSA flooding-and-health advice: exhaust gases contain carbon monoxide; floodwater can carry sewage
  When: after any flood | Cost: £10-£30 | Qty (family of 4): 1 set of protective clothing
  gov.uk

- [ ] **In snow or ice wear shoes with good grip, check Met Office warnings before you travel, and keep a few essentials in the car boot**
  Be Ready: slips, falls and car accidents rise on icy surfaces; the Met Office says cold spells remain possible later this winter
  When: before the first cold snap | Cost: £0-£30
  beready.campaign.gov.uk

Documents

- [ ] **Keep copies of key documents and a paper list of emergency contacts in a waterproof bag**
  Red Cross kit lists copies of important documents in a waterproof bag
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £3-£15 | Qty (family of 4): 1 set per household
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Move important documents upstairs when a flood warning is issued**
  Red Cross flood guidance
  When: when a warning is issued
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Keep a paper list of medicines and insurance details and an out-of-area contact**
  Lets you claim and get care without a phone
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 per household
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Know how to replace a lost or water-damaged birth certificate or passport on GOV.UK**
  GRO provides replacement certificates; HM Passport Office requires lost or stolen passports to be cancelled before replacement and identifies water staining as damage
  When: This month | Cost: Birth certificate £12.50 standard; search surcharges and passport fees may apply
  gov.uk ; gov.uk

Children

- [ ] **Pack nappies and wipes for each infant in the kit**
  Red Cross lists baby supplies; gov.uk advises ready-made formula because you may not be able to boil water or sterilise bottles
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£50 (nappies, wipes and formula together) | Qty (family of 4): At least 3 days for each infant, incl. nappies and wipes
  redcross.org.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **Pack ready-to-feed formula and any baby medicines in the kit**
  Red Cross lists baby supplies; gov.uk advises ready-made formula because you may not be able to boil water or sterilise bottles
  When: This fortnight | Cost: see the nappies and wipes row | Qty (family of 4): At least 3 days for each infant, incl. nappies and wipes
  redcross.org.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **Learn the NHS way to make up formula. If you cannot boil water, use ready-to-feed formula. Ask your health visitor if unsure**
  NHS preparation requires freshly boiled water remaining at least 70°C when mixed with powder; FSA power-cut advice identifies ready-to-use formula as an option if water cannot be boiled
  When: This fortnight
  nhs.uk ; gov.uk

- [ ] **Agree a meeting place and an out-of-area contact; teach children 999 and the plan**
  Official advice for family plans
  When: This fortnight
  redcross.org.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk

- [ ] **Keep children out of floodwater**
  Red Cross flood advice
  When: every flood event
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Know where to get NHS, YoungMinds and Samaritans (116 123, 24 hours) mental-health support after a flood or storm**
  Disruption and displacement affect children and adults; NHS has a section for children, teenagers and parents, YoungMinds has a parents helpline, UKHSA lists Samaritans
  When: This month
  nhs.uk ; youngminds.org.uk ; gov.uk

Older, disabled and medical needs

- [ ] **Join the free Priority Services Register through your electricity network operator. For most of the region that is SP Electricity North West (its Extra Care Register); Merseyside and parts of Cheshire are served by SP Energy Networks. Find yours by postcode at thepsr.co.uk. Call 105 for power cuts**
  Gets support in a power cut; registering through your network operator via thepsr.co.uk shares your details with your gas and water providers; check eligibility there
  When: This fortnight
  enwl.co.uk ; thepsr.co.uk

- [ ] **Join your energy supplier's Priority Services Register too (state pension age, young children, health conditions, powered medical equipment qualify)**
  Suppliers and network operators keep separate registers; contact each
  When: This fortnight
  ofgem.gov.uk

- [ ] **Register with United Utilities Priority Services (0345 072 6093) and ask what support is available if your water supply is interrupted**
  Free Priority Services give extra support so the company can respond to specific needs
  When: This fortnight
  unitedutilities.com

- [ ] **Talk to your clinical team and equipment provider about medicines and powered equipment in a power cut. Keep power banks charged**
  Individual equipment and medicine instructions determine safe backup arrangements; the NHS trust advises contacting a pharmacy or manufacturer after a power cut or fridge breakdown; Red Cross kit lists fully charged power banks for a power cut
  When: This fortnight | Cost: varies | Qty (family of 4): As your clinical team advises
  beready.campaign.gov.uk ; gov.uk ; ulh.nhs.uk ; redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Agree check-ins with neighbours and relatives; if you need extra help, ask Floodline to send warnings to a friend or relative**
  Government cold-weather advice recommends checking on people at higher risk; Environment Agency guidance allows warnings to be sent on your behalf
  When: This fortnight
  gov.uk ; beready.campaign.gov.uk
- [ ] **Ask your pharmacist or medicine manufacturer what to do if refrigerated medicines lose cooling; do not use damaged or visibly changed medicines and return them to a pharmacy**
  Follow each medicine's storage leaflet. Some in-use insulin pens can stay at room temperature for up to 4 weeks, but not all insulins: check yours.
  When: within 2 weeks; seek advice after any loss of refrigeration | Cost: free advice (replacement prescription charges may apply)
  ulh.nhs.uk ; nhs.uk

Pets

- [ ] **Add pet supplies (food, medication) to the kit and plan for special diets**
  Red Cross kit and El Niño page
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£25 | Qty (family of 4): 3 days of food per pet
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Include pets in the evacuation plan and take every pet with you**
  Pets can be trapped by rising water
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £10-£40 | Qty (family of 4): 1 carrier or lead per pet
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Consider the needs of pets and of family members with specific dietary requirements when stocking food**
  El Niño page says plan for pets
  When: This fortnight
  redcross.org.uk

Alerts and communication

- [ ] **Sign up for Floodline warnings: call 0345 988 1188 (24h; textphone 0345 602 6340) or online**
  Official river, sea and groundwater flood warnings; no warnings for surface water
  When: Now | Cost: free service; normal call charges apply
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Check live flood alerts and warnings for your area**
  Official live flood alerts and warnings for England
  When: check daily Nov-Feb
  check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk
- [ ] **Subscribe to Met Office email warnings and use the app**
  Weather warnings (e.g. wind) with app and email alerts from the Met Office
  When: Now
  weather.metoffice.gov.uk
- [ ] **Keep phone Emergency Alerts on; no sign-up needed**
  Used for life-threatening emergencies; sounds even on silent
  When: check phone settings now
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Buy a battery or wind-up radio with spare batteries and a power bank**
  Radio gives updates when phones or internet fail
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£50 | Qty (family of 4): 1 radio + 1 power bank
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Bookmark Cumbria Prepared for local emergency preparation, response, recovery and contact information**
  Cumbria Local Resilience Forum provides multi-agency preparedness information and links to official weather and flood warnings
  When: This fortnight
  cumbriaprepared.org.uk
- [ ] **Learn what Met Office warning colours mean: yellow = read the warning to see which weather it covers; amber = possible travel delays, road and rail closures, power cuts and risk to life and property; red = dangerous weather, risk to life, take action now**
  Met Office: yellow warnings cover a range of situations so read the content; amber means increased likelihood of impacts that could disrupt plans; red means dangerous weather is expected and you should act now
  When: before the first winter storm
  metoffice.gov.uk

- [ ] **Learn the three England flood warning levels: flood alert = flooding is possible; flood warning = flooding is expected; severe flood warning = risk to life and significant disruption. Check your area at gov.uk/check-flooding or call Floodline 0345 988 1188**
  Environment Agency issues 3 levels in England; severe flood warnings can be issued before, during or after flooding; know which one needs action now
  When: Now
  gov.uk

Money and insurance

- [ ] **Check buildings and contents policies cover flood; ask your insurer**
  Check before the season; renters check landlord policy
  When: This fortnight | Cost: free to check
  gov.uk
- [ ] **If flood-cover quotes are high or refused, check Flood Re eligibility and compare participating insurers; ask about Build Back Better when claiming**
  Eligibility has several conditions and differs between buildings and individual contents cover, including flats. Eligible claims with Build Back Better participating insurers may include up to £10,000 for resilience measures during repairs
  When: This fortnight | Cost: free to check
  floodre.co.uk ; floodre.co.uk ; gov.uk
- [ ] **Ask the Environment Agency for a free letter if your insurer wants flood-risk evidence (within 20 days)**
  Supports insurance applications
  When: as needed
  gov.uk
- [ ] **After a flood: photograph damage, tell your insurer, get approval before repairs, and keep damaged items until told**
  Protects your claim
  When: after any flood
  greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk
- [ ] **Keep some emergency cash**
  Cards and cash machines can fail in power cuts
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £30-£100 (own money, not a purchase) | Qty (family of 4): amount depends on household need (typically £30-£100)
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Check eligibility for Cold Weather Payments (£25 per qualifying seven-day period, 1 November 2026 to 31 March 2027) and the one-off £150 Warm Home Discount**
  Eligible households may receive help with winter energy bills; Cold Weather Payments depend on qualifying benefits and recorded or forecast temperatures averaging 0°C or below for seven consecutive days
  When: This month
  gov.uk ; gov.uk
- [ ] **If energy bills are hard to pay, contact your supplier now about a payment plan**
  Ofgem: the cap rose 4% to £1,723 a year for a typical dual-fuel Direct Debit home from 1 October 2026; suppliers should set up manageable payments and point you to help
  When: Now. Key date: Ofgem announces the January to March 2027 price cap on 25 Nov 2026.
  ofgem.gov.uk ; ofgem.gov.uk

Local help

- [ ] **Cumberland: bookmark the council's flooding page and use it to report flooding**
  Carlisle, Keswick, Cockermouth
  When: bookmark now
  cumberland.gov.uk
- [ ] **Westmorland and Furness Council: preparing for flooding and community resilience groups**
  Kendal, Appleby, Eden
  When: bookmark now
  westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk
- [ ] **Bookmark Lancashire flood advice; obtain protection in advance because any council sandbag provision is limited and conditional**
  Lancashire County Council may make small self-collected supplies available at selected depots under its named-storm policy; availability is not guaranteed
  When: bookmark now
  lancashire.gov.uk ; lancashireprepared.org.uk

- [ ] **Greater Manchester: bookmark the GMCA flooding advice page**
  Greater Manchester Resilience Forum flood preparation and response guidance for the city region's 10 districts
  When: bookmark now
  greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk
- [ ] **Write down: 999 for immediate danger; 105 for power cuts; Floodline 0345 988 1188; Gas Emergency 0800 111 999; United Utilities 0345 672 3723**
  Cumbria Prepared lists these
  When: write down now | Cost: free/call charges
  cumbriaprepared.org.uk
- [ ] **Environment Agency 03708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8am-6pm)**
  Non-emergency
  When: as needed | Cost: call charges
  gov.uk
- [ ] **British Red Cross preparedness guidance**
  Practical guidance on kits and plans
  When: Now
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **If you or someone else is in immediate danger in a flood call 999; Floodline 0345 988 1188 (24 hours) for flood warnings and advice**
  gov.uk help during a flood
  When: save now | Cost: 999 free; Floodline call charges apply
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Salford: bookmark the council's Emergencies page for emergency council contacts and major-incident planning information**
  The council page provides office-hours and out-of-hours emergency contacts and explains its emergency management plan
  When: This fortnight
  salford.gov.uk

General preparedness information from official sources, not personal, legal, medical or insurance advice. Always follow instructions from your local authorities and emergency services. In an emergency call 999 or 112 (UK) or 911 (US). Checklist built from official-source tables (source hosts shown; full links on the website); costs marked indicative are planning ranges.

Full links and updates: ninoprep.com/zones/uk-tld/
Scan the code or type the address.