Northern Ireland: 2026-27 El Nino checklist

Last reviewed: 2 Nov 2026 · Peak risk window: Jan-Mar · 64 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 of bottled water and long-life ready-to-eat food, with a tin opener**
  Power cuts and flooding can cut water and cooking; the Red Cross home kit specifies 3 days; the page also says water needs can increase to around 10 litres per person per day
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£40 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 3 days of water at around 2.5 to 3 litres per person per day (about 30-36 litres for 4, derived) plus 3 days of long-life or ready-to-eat food
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Stock no-cook ready-to-eat meals for a power cut**
  Mains-electric hobs and kettles stop in a power cut; the Red Cross kit lists no-cook ready-to-eat food
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £10-£30 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 3 days of no-cook meals for 4
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Keep fridge and freezer doors shut during a power cut; follow FSA temperature-based guidance for chilled food**
  Fridge: about 4 hours cold; freezer: about 48 hours full or 24 hours half full. These are estimates; chilled-food safety also depends on temperature.
  When: during any power cut
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Do not eat any food that has been in floodwater**
  nidirect: do not eat any food that was in flood water; flood water could contain sewage and contaminate drinking water
  When: after any flood
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **After a flood throw away food and drink not in a sealed waterproof container, plus screwcap, snap-lid, pull-tab and dented or swollen cans and any food in porous packaging; wash the outside of undamaged sealed cans or pouches before opening**
  FSA advice applies in NI and distinguishes waterproof packaging from unsafe containers; flood-affected fridges and freezers need safety checks before reuse. Power-cut food safety has separate guidance.
  When: after any flood or power cut
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Add a first aid kit, toiletries and spare glasses to your emergency kit**
  nidirect's household emergency kit lists a first aid kit, toiletries and spare glasses or contact lenses
  When: Now | Cost: £10-£25 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 1 kit per household
  nidirect.gov.uk

Power, heat and light

- [ ] **Report power cuts to NIE Networks on 03457 643 643 (its Customer Helpline) and save the number in your phone**
  NIE Networks' helpline takes power-cut reports in Northern Ireland
  When: This fortnight
  nienetworks.co.uk
- [ ] **Keep torches and spare batteries, know where your fuse box is, and do not let an EV battery run low**
  NIE Networks pre-cut advice
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£20 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): A torch and spare batteries; we suggest 2 per household
  nienetworks.co.uk
- [ ] **Fit an audible CO alarm meeting British or European standards (BS Kitemark or EN 50291); use a Gas Safe registered engineer for gas appliances**
  nidirect recommends CO alarms and regular appliance servicing; alarms do not remove the need for maintenance.
  When: This fortnight | Cost: from £20 per alarm (nidirect) | Qty (family of 4): No household alarm count specified by this source
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Operate portable generators outdoors away from open doors and windows; never use them in homes, garages or partially enclosed spaces**
  HSENI warns that generator exhaust can cause fatal CO poisoning even where there is partial ventilation.
  When: before any use
  hseni.gov.uk

- [ ] **Use battery or wind-up torches rather than candles; wear layers and use blankets, close curtains and doors to keep heat in**
  Red Cross advises torches over candles (fire risk) and layering during a power cut; heat pumps and electric boilers may stop working
  When: This month | Cost: £10-£40 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): Blankets and warm layers for 4
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Know carbon monoxide symptoms (headache, dizziness, nausea, tiredness, confusion, shortness of breath) and what to do**
  If you suspect CO, turn appliances off if safe, open windows and doors, and get outside. If you have symptoms, go to an emergency department straight away. Call 999 if someone collapses or struggles to breathe.
  When: learn before use of fuel-burning appliances
  nidirect.gov.uk ; nhs.uk

- [ ] **Never touch or go near damaged electricity equipment or fallen power lines. Report them to NIE Networks on 03457 643 643, and call 999 if anyone is in danger**
  NIE Networks: never touch damaged electricity equipment. Red Cross: if downed lines pose a significant risk to the public, call 999.
  When: at each storm warning
  nienetworks.co.uk ; redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Check your heating oil tank before you order: look for cracks, rust or leaks, watch for unusually high use, check the level and do not over-order; be home for deliveries**
  DAERA/NIEA advises an annual inspection by a competent person; report a spill that could reach rivers or the coast on the NIEA incident hotline 0800 80 70 60
  When: before your next oil order | Cost: free (inspection cost varies) | Qty (family of 4): 1 check per tank
  daera-ni.gov.uk

Flood and storm protection

- [ ] **Check your area's flood risk on Flood Maps NI (linked from nidirect) and note which of your roads flood**
  nidirect says Flood Maps NI shows flood-prone areas; treat it as a guide (nidirect does not set out the map layers or accuracy)
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **If your home is at risk, have sandbags, floodboards or plastic covers ready for doors and airbricks**
  nidirect flood-prep advice: have sandbags, floodboards or plastic covers ready to block doorways and airbricks
  When: This month | Cost: £30-£300+ (indicative, varies widely) | Qty (family of 4): Enough to cover each external door plus airbricks
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Maintain private drains and clear private gullies, especially in autumn**
  nidirect identifies autumn leaves as a cause of temporary blockages.
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Save the Flooding Incident Line (0300 2000 100) and report flooding or a fallen tree/blocked road (0300 200 7891)**
  Single NI number for reporting flooding; 0300 200 7891 is for a fallen tree or blocked road (both listed by nidirect)
  When: save within 2 weeks
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Secure garden furniture, bins and trampolines before storms**
  Met Office guidance explicitly lists securing garden furniture, bins and trampolines to prevent injury or damage.
  When: before high winds arrive
  weather.metoffice.gov.uk

- [ ] **On a heavy-rain warning, move cars, pets, valuables and documents to safety and switch off gas, electricity and water if it is safe; call the Flooding Incident Line to report flooding**
  nidirect: turn off gas, electricity and water supplies if it is safe; to report flooding phone 0300 2000 100 (open 24/7); call 999 if you are in danger; contact your insurer before clearing up
  When: when a warning is issued
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Never walk, cycle or drive through floodwater**
  nidirect warns about hidden hazards and fast-flowing water. Even shallow moving water can knock you over or move a car.
  When: during any flood
  nidirect.gov.uk

Home preparation

- [ ] **Know where to turn off your electricity and gas supplies**
  nidirect lists knowing the utility isolation points.
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Keep copies of home insurance documents in your flood emergency kit**
  nidirect specifically lists home insurance copies.
  When: This month | Qty (family of 4): Policy copies for the household; no fixed quantity specified
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Arrange regular servicing of fuel-burning appliances; have solid-fuel chimneys and flues swept annually**
  nidirect recommends appliance servicing and annual sweeping for solid fuel; gas work needs a Gas Safe registered engineer.
  When: This month | Cost: £60-£150 (indicative)
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Download and complete nidirect's Household Severe Weather Plan**
  nidirect provides a downloadable severe-weather planning document, published 14 September 2017.
  When: This month | Qty (family of 4): 1 plan per household
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **After a flood, do not use electrics or gas appliances that floodwater touched until a qualified electrician or Gas Safe engineer has checked them**
  nidirect requires flood-affected electrical appliances to be checked before reuse and a Gas Safe inspection of gas heating or appliances after flooding.
  When: after any flood | Cost: varies (no verified price)
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **If the emergency services tell you to leave your home, go; take your emergency kit, medicines and pets**
  nidirect: refusing to leave on their advice puts you and the people trying to help you at risk; call 999 if you are in danger
  When: during any flood
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Lag pipes and tanks in lofts, garages and outbuildings, and find your stop tap (usually under the kitchen sink); if a pipe freezes, turn off the stop tap and thaw it from the tap end, never with a naked flame**
  NI Water winter advice; for a burst pipe turn off the stop tap and call a WaterSafe approved plumber (0333 207 9030)
  When: before the first frost | Cost: £5-£30 (indicative)
  niwater.com

Documents

- [ ] **Put copies of important documents (for example birth certificates, insurance policies, photographic identification) and copies of prescriptions in a waterproof bag in your kit**
  Red Cross kit: copies of important documents stored in a waterproof bag and copies of prescriptions; nidirect household emergency kit lists birth certificates, insurance policies and photographic identification
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £3-£10 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 1 bag for the household
  redcross.org.uk ; nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Back up digital copies of key documents to separate storage or cloud storage**
  NI Cyber Security Centre recommends separate backups and cloud storage for disaster recovery; this household use adapts its organisation-focused guidance.
  When: This month | Cost: free-£10 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): No official household quantity specified
  nicybersecuritycentre.gov.uk

- [ ] **Keep a paper list of emergency contacts and your GP, council and utility numbers**
  Red Cross and nidirect kits both list a paper contact list; phones can die in a power cut
  When: This fortnight | Qty (family of 4): 1 laminated list
  redcross.org.uk

Children

- [ ] **Add nappies and wipes to the kit (Red Cross: baby supplies if needed)**
  Red Cross kit for children and babies: nappies and wipes, formula milk or baby food, bottles and feeding equipment, children's medication. See the unsafe-water formula row.
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£50 (indicative) (nappies, wipes and formula together) | Qty (family of 4): Size to your child's needs: the Red Cross page gives no baby-specific quantity (three days only for water and food)
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **Add formula to the kit if you feed it to a baby (Red Cross lists formula milk or baby food)**
  Red Cross kit for children and babies: nappies and wipes, formula milk or baby food, bottles and feeding equipment, children's medication. See the unsafe-water formula row.
  When: This fortnight | Cost: see the nappies and wipes row | Qty (family of 4): Size to your child's needs: the Red Cross page gives no baby-specific quantity (three days only for water and food)
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Agree how household members will contact each other and where to go if separated during flooding**
  nidirect recommends a household contact and reunion arrangement.
  When: This month | Qty (family of 4): 1 plan per household
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Keep children and pets out of floodwater and contaminated areas; wash hands after contact with floodwater**
  nidirect: keep children and pets out of contaminated areas; hand washing after contact with floodwater is confirmed on the page
  When: after any flooding
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **If tap water is unsafe or off, make up formula with bottled or tanker water. Boil it and let it cool in the kettle for no more than 30 minutes, so it stays at 70°C or hotter. Or use ready-made formula. If you cannot boil water, use unboiled bottled water and give the feed straight away. Never use unboiled tanker water. Choose bottled water with sodium (Na) no higher than 200 mg per litre**
  nidirect: use tanker or bottled water, boil it and leave to cool in the kettle for no more than 30 minutes (stays at 70°C or more); ready-made formula is an alternative; with no gas or electricity use unboiled bottled water and give the feed immediately; never use unboiled tanker water; do not use unsafe drinking water to wash children
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£15 (indicative, bottled water) | Qty (family of 4): 3 days' water for formula feeds (no official figure)
  nidirect.gov.uk

Older, disabled and medical needs

- [ ] **Join the NIE Networks Customer Care Register if you rely on electricity for health needs**
  Gives priority call handling, callbacks and updates in a power cut, and 3 days' notice of planned cuts; the NI equivalent of the Priority Services Register
  When: This fortnight
  nienetworks.co.uk
- [ ] **Join the NI Water customer care register if you depend on water supply for care**
  nidirect care-registers page lists the NIE Networks and NI Water registers separately; check each one
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Include regularly prescribed medication in your household emergency essentials**
  nidirect explicitly lists regularly prescribed medication.
  When: This month | Cost: free-£30 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): Individual prescription needs; no quantity specified
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Check older or vulnerable friends and relatives are safe, warm and well; offer help before cold weather**
  nidirect recommends checking vulnerable neighbours and helping less-mobile people obtain essentials or repeat prescriptions.
  When: before and during cold weather
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **If you keep medicines in a fridge (for example insulin), ask your GP or pharmacist now what to do in a power cut and keep the fridge shut**
  Red Cross: a closed fridge will usually stay cold for up to four hours. No official NI page opened gives a safe time out of the fridge for specific medicines, so ask your pharmacist or prescriber
  When: This fortnight
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Take flood-contaminated medicines to a pharmacy for safe disposal**
  London Fire Brigade advises safe disposal of contaminated medicines through a pharmacy; this is general advice from an English fire authority.
  When: after any flood
  london-fire.gov.uk

Pets

- [ ] **Pack pet food, water bowl, collar/lead and medication in the kit**
  nidirect kit list includes pet food, water bowl, collar or lead and medication
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £5-£25 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): Supplies for each pet; source specifies no number of days
  nidirect.gov.uk

- [ ] **Include pet supplies and a carrier (if you have one) in your emergency kit and keep essentials packed together for leaving at short notice**
  Red Cross emergency kit page lists leads, harnesses or carriers, medication and bedding for pets; pet records are not named on the page
  When: This month | Cost: £15-£50 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 1 carrier per cat/small pet
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **Move pets to safety early on a flood warning and keep them out of floodwater**
  nidirect advises moving pets and keeping children and pets out of contaminated areas
  When: when a warning is issued
  nidirect.gov.uk

Alerts and communication

- [ ] **Subscribe to Met Office warning emails and select Northern Ireland; read the linked warning details**
  The free email service offers Northern Ireland regional weather warnings.
  When: Now
  metoffice.gov.uk
- [ ] **Check your phone receives UK Emergency Alerts (iOS 14.5+, Android 11+, 4G/5G)**
  Alerts work on all UK 4G and 5G networks. You do not need to sign up.
  When: Now
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Use Powercheck (NIE Networks power cut map) and report power cuts online or by phone**
  NIE Networks page: power cut map for regular updates, a Report Online link and a Customer Helpline on 03457 643 643
  When: This fortnight
  nienetworks.co.uk
- [ ] **Buy a battery or wind-up radio and a power bank**
  Both nidirect and Red Cross kits list radio and phone charger or power bank
  When: This fortnight | Cost: £15-£50 (indicative) | Qty (family of 4): 1 radio; 1-2 power banks
  redcross.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

Money and insurance

- [ ] **Ask your insurer whether flood insurance through Flood Re is available for your home**
  Flood Re helps some homes get flood cover. NI homes built before 1 January 2009 can qualify if they meet all its conditions. Ask your insurer what is covered and when cover starts.
  When: check now; confirm cover start date and exclusions with insurer | Cost: free to check; premiums vary
  floodre.co.uk
- [ ] **Check eligibility and apply for the NI Home Heating Oil Support Scheme's £100 digital card**
  Oil must be your main heating. You also need a qualifying benefit (such as Pension Credit or Universal Credit) or net income below £30,000 on any day from 1 to 30 November 2026 (or in April 2026). One £100 card per home. Helpline 0800 072 0266 (Mon-Fri 9am-4pm).
  When: once eligible. Key date: Apply before the scheme closes on 31 Mar 2027. | Cost: free (grants £100) | Qty (family of 4): 1 application per address
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **In Northern Ireland, VAT on home electricity stays at 5%. The 0% rate from 1 October 2026 to 31 March 2027 applies only in Great Britain**
  HMRC's brief distinguishes NI from Great Britain and limits the zero rate to qualifying electricity supplies.
  When: when checking bills
  gov.uk
- [ ] **Ask NI Energy Advice (0800 111 44 55) about the Affordable Warmth Scheme: grants up to £7,500 if income under £23,000**
  NIHE page confirms terms; funding-dependent and 2026 status not confirmed
  When: apply before winter; check funding
  nihe.gov.uk
- [ ] **Keep some emergency cash and keep a note of insurer claim lines**
  Red Cross and nidirect kits list cash and cards; ATMs and card readers fail in power cuts
  When: This month | Cost: your own money | Qty (family of 4): a small float in small notes (amount your choice)
  redcross.org.uk

- [ ] **The GB Ofgem price cap does not apply in Northern Ireland: the Utility Regulator approves the maximum tariffs Power NI can charge, and other suppliers compete against it**
  Utility Regulator regulated-tariffs page; the Consumer Council says the Ofgem cap does not apply in NI; heating oil prices are not regulated
  When: before winter
  uregni.gov.uk ; consumercouncil.org.uk

Local help

- [ ] **Know Lifeline (0808 808 8000, free, 24/7) for distress after a bad event**
  NI crisis response helpline for anyone in distress or despair; free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; textphone 18001 0808 808 8000 (NI Government family support directory)
  When: save within 2 weeks
  familysupportni.gov.uk
- [ ] **Save your council's contact: 11 NI councils are listed on nidirect with contact pages**
  The nidirect directory links contact pages for all 11 NI councils.
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Save NI Water: Waterline 0345 744 0088 (24/7), Leakline 0800 028 2011**
  NI Water emergency contacts for supply failure, leaks and bursts
  When: This fortnight
  niwater.com
- [ ] **Know nidirect Emergencies for the Household Emergency Life-saving Plan, flood plan and care registers**
  nidirect hub for NI emergency preparation
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Use the British Red Cross emergency kit and El Niño advice**
  UK-wide Red Cross guidance; the El Niño page does not name Northern Ireland
  When: This month
  redcross.org.uk
- [ ] **If you smell gas, call the NI Gas Emergency Service on 0800 002 001 (free, 24 hours). Turn off the gas at the meter, open doors and windows, and do not switch electrics on or off**
  nidirect's household emergency kit identifies this as the NI Gas Emergency Service, rather than a general supplier account line.
  When: save within 2 weeks
  nidirect.gov.uk ; nidirect.gov.uk
- [ ] **Check Northern Ireland Water's current service updates for supply problems in your area**
  NI Water 'Current Service Updates' page
  When: during any power cut
  niwater.com
- [ ] **Read nidirect's guide to getting ready as a community for major incidents and emergencies**
  nidirect: information on how communities can plan for major incidents and emergencies
  When: This fortnight
  nidirect.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-tln/
Scan the code or type the address.