

## **Causes and Symptoms of Fuel Poverty**

Fuel poverty is caused by low incomes, high energy prices and energy inefficient housing.

Governments in the devolved nations have retained the traditional ten percent definition of fuel poverty, which means a household is deemed to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10% of household income on fuel to achieve an adequate level of warmth.

Fuel poverty is measured in England using the low income-high cost definition, which states that a household is in fuel poverty if

- Their income is below the poverty line (taking into account energy costs) and;
- Their energy costs are higher than is typical for their household type.

The World Health Organisation recommends that indoor temperatures are kept at 18 – 21C (64-70F). 18C is suitable for healthy people who are appropriately dressed but those with illnesses, disabilities or who are very old or young may need to keep temperatures higher to maintain good health.

Many fuel poor households keep their temperatures below this recommended range so energy bills may not always be an accurate way of assessing if they are likely to be in fuel poverty.

There are other symptoms to look for to recognise if the household might be struggling with their heating or energy bills:

### ***What you might hear:***

- My home is usually too cold
- My home is draughty
- I have respiratory problems
- My fuel bills are too high
- I am getting into fuel debt
- I stay in bed to keep warm
- I want to stay in hospital because it is more comfortable
- I use a prepayment meter to avoid incurring debt

### ***What you might feel:***

- Cold
- Large differences in temperatures between rooms
- Client's hands cold to the touch
- Damp
- Draughty
- Depressed atmosphere

### ***What you might see:***

- Children constantly have runny noses, rashes, ear infections, conjunctivitis
- Children often off school
- Mould stains on walls or curtains
- Peeling wallpaper or paint
- Ventilation points blocked

- Householder wearing too much clothing
- Portable heaters or single fires being used instead of central heating

You should also be aware that some householders may turn their heating on especially for visitors so the house may be warm for your visit but this may not give the full picture of the temperature the house is at the rest of the time.