

Being Prepared in the Event of a Winter Weather Emergency

Winter storm weather can range from freezing rain, sleet and ice, to moderate snowfall over a smaller timeframe, to a blizzard that can last for several days. Many storms are accompanied by dangerously low temperatures, making conditions even worse.

These storms can make roads, highways and walkways very dangerous and may limit community services such as health programs, schools and daycares, and public transportation. Winter storms can also cause power outages that last for days. Injuries and deaths may occur from severe cold exposure, dangerous road conditions, and carbon monoxide poisoning among other conditions.

Before Snowstorms and Extreme Cold

- Make a Family Communication Plan - it is important to know how you will get in contact with one another and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Make an emergency kit for at least three days of self-sufficiency including important items such as gallons of water, ready-to-eat food, flashlights, a first aid kit, and a battery operated radio.
- Space heater safety: Use electric space heaters with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements. All heat sources should be at least three feet away from furniture and drapes at all times.

Prepare your home:

- Make sure your home is well insulated to keep the warm air inside
- Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts)
- If you have a wood burning fireplace, consider storing wood to provide you with heat in the case of a power outage
- Have these items easily accessible: extra blankets, sleeping bags and warm winter coats
- Make sure you have a cell phone with an emergency charging option in case of a power failure
- People who depend on electricity to operate medical equipment should have alternate arrangements in place in case power is out for an extended period of time.
- Plan to keep pets inside and make sure to have enough food and water for them
- Fill water jugs and place them in the freezer to help keep food cold in the event of a power outage

During Snowstorms and Extreme Cold

- Stay indoors during severe storms
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary
- Walk carefully on walkways as they will be snowy and icy
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow as this may lead to a heart attack. Use caution, take breaks, push the snow instead of lifting when possible, and lift lighter loads.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat
- Wear a hat and cover your mouth with a scarf to reduce heat loss.

Severe Cold Weather Conditions

Frostbite is a serious condition that's caused by exposure to extremely cold temperatures. Signs of frostbite include numbness, a white or grayish-yellow skin area, or skin that feels waxy or unusually firm. If you believe you may have symptoms of frostbite, seek medical attention right away.

Hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature, is a dangerous condition that occurs when a body is exposed to extremely cold temperatures for a prolonged period of time. Your body begins to lose heat faster than it's produced when exposed to cold for too long, and will eventually use up the body's stored energy leading to lower body temperature. Warning signs of hypothermia include: shivering, confusion, memory loss, exhaustion, drowsiness, and slurred speech. In infants, symptoms include cold skin, bright red skin, and very low energy. Seek medical attention right away if your body temperature is below 95° F

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide poisoning deaths are highest in the winter due to increased use of gas-powered furnaces and alternative heat sources, inappropriate use of power sources indoors during power outages, and cooking.

Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Locate unit away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors. Keep these devices at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents.

Install carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home to provide warning of accumulating carbon monoxide. If the alarm sounds, relocate to a location with fresh air, such as the outdoors or by an open window or door.