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# Cold Weather Precautions

## *What You Need to Know*



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During winter storms and cold temperatures, extra steps are needed to stay safe and warm. Frostbite and hypothermia can happen quickly in very cold temperatures. Be prepared and protect yourself and your family.

### **Take Precautions While Outdoors:**

Minimize time spent outdoors while temperatures are low. If you must be outdoors:

- Dress appropriately for the weather – wear a tightly-woven, wind and water-resistant coat, layers of warm and loose-fitting clothing, hat, scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth, mittens, and water-resistant boots.
- Stay dry – wet clothing (even from sweat) chills the body more rapidly.
- Avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing and fueling your car or using a snow blower or a generator. These materials greatly increase heat loss from the body.
- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches to prevent slipping and falling.
- Work slowly while doing outside chores to avoid excess strain on your heart and body.
- Carry a cell phone to call for help in an emergency. Notify friends and family where you will be if going hiking, skiing, or camping.
- Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat and is a signal to return indoors.

### **Take Precautions While Indoors:**

Maintaining a warm home is an important step in staying safe in cold weather. Set the thermostat no lower than 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Avoid unnecessarily opening doors and windows, close off unused rooms, place towels or rags in cracks under doors, and close draperies or cover windows at night.

Practice safe heating by doing the following:

- Never leave a space heater unattended.
- Locate a space heater more than 3 feet away from fire hazards such as drapes, furniture, or bedding.
- Never cover a space heater or place it on top of furniture or near water.
- Do not run a space heater cord under carpets or rugs, but make sure it is not a tripping hazard.
- Avoid using extension cords to plug in space heaters.
- Follow all manufacturer instructions for your space heater.
- Do not use unvented combustion units, generators, grills or camp stoves inside your home. Locate generators outside AND at least 20 feet from windows and doors.
- Only use fireplaces and wood stoves that are properly vented to the outside.
- Have vented combustion space heaters professionally inspected every year.
- Use proper fuel type for non-electric heating devices.
- Install a battery-operated carbon monoxide (CO) detector in your home. Leave your home and call 911 immediately if the CO detector sounds.

Extreme cold weather can cause water pipes in your home to freeze and sometimes rupture. Reduce the risk of pipes freezing by doing the following:

- Leave water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.
- Open cabinet doors beneath sinks to improve the circulation of heated air near pipes

If your pipes do freeze, do not thaw them with a torch. Instead, thaw them slowly by directing the warm air from an electric hair dryer onto the pipes. Use bottled water to drink.

## Prepare in Advance for Travel and Weather-Related Emergencies

- Keep your car's gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Use a wintertime fluid formula for your windshield washer.
- Keep a winter emergency kit in your car in case you become stranded. The kit should include a portable cell phone charger, blankets, food and water, and a first-aid kit.
- Be aware of current and forecast weather conditions when planning travel.
- Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration, and water stored in clean containers.
- Ensure that your cell phone is fully charged.
- Have an emergency kit that contains battery-operated flashlights, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, extra batteries, a first-aid kit, and extra medicine.
- Check on elderly or homebound family and neighbors to help ensure that they have the needed supplies, food, and heat to stay safe.

## What are Frostbite and Hypothermia?

Frostbite is caused by freezing that results in loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes, and can permanently damage the body. Severe cases can lead to amputation. Signs that may indicate frostbite include:

- White or grayish-yellow skin area
- Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- Numbness

Because the frozen tissue is numb, it is possible to be unaware that frostbite is happening. At the first signs of redness or pain in any area protect exposed skin, get out of the cold, and seek medical attention immediately if you suspect frostbite. Do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes, rub/massage affected areas, or use hot water/heating pads/heat lamps, as this can cause more damage.

Hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature, is a dangerous condition that can occur when a person is exposed to extremely cold temperatures. Warnings signs of hypothermia in adults include:

- Shivering
- Exhaustion
- Confusion
- Fumbling hands
- Memory loss
- Slurred speech
- Drowsiness
- In infants, signs of hypothermia include bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

Seek immediate medical assistance for hypothermia. Get the victim into a warm room or shelter, remove any wet clothing, and use blankets to warm the center of the body first—chest, neck, head, and groin.



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