

## Winter Weather Safety and Preparedness Tips

*(Information provided by: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)*

When winter temperatures drop significantly below normal, staying warm and safe can become a challenge. Whenever temperatures drop decidedly below normal and as wind speed increases, heat can leave your body more rapidly. These weather-related conditions may lead to serious health problems. Extreme cold is a dangerous situation that can bring on health emergencies in susceptible people, such as infants and the elderly, and those without shelter or who are stranded, or who live in a home that is poorly insulated or without heat.

**If you are in a life-threatening situation call 9-1-1. To contact service agencies for assistance, call 2-1-1.**

Extremely cold temperatures often accompany a winter storm, so you may have to cope with power failures and icy roads. Although staying indoors as much as possible can help reduce the risk of car crashes and falls on the ice, you may also face indoor hazards. Many homes will be too cold – either due to a power failure or because the heating system isn't adequate for the weather. **When people must use space heaters and fireplaces to stay warm, the risk of household fires increases, as well as the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Never use charcoal grills or portable gas camp stoves indoors – the fumes are deadly!!**

Taking preventive action is your best defense against having to deal with extreme cold-weather conditions. By preparing your home and car in advance for winter emergencies, and by observing safety precautions during times of extremely cold weather, you can reduce the risk of weather-related health problems.

### **Prepare Your Home**

Although periods of extreme cold cannot always be predicted far in advance, weather forecasts can sometimes provide you with several days' notice. Listen to weather forecasts regularly, and check your emergency supplies whenever a period of extreme cold is predicted.

If you plan to use a fireplace or wood stove for emergency heating, have your chimney or flue inspected each year. Ask your local fire department to recommend an inspector, or find one in the yellow pages of your telephone directory under "chimney cleaning." Also, if you'll be using a fireplace, wood stove, or kerosene heater, install a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated. Test them monthly, and replace batteries twice a year.

Your ability to feel a change in temperature decreases with age, and older people are more susceptible to health problems caused by cold. If you are over 65 years old, place an easy-to-read thermometer in an indoor location where you will see it frequently, and check the temperature of your home often during the winter months.

Insulate any water lines that run along exterior walls so your water supply will be less likely to freeze. To the extent possible, weatherproof your home by adding weather-stripping, insulation, insulated doors and storm windows, or thermal-pane windows.

**If you have pets, bring them indoors. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate shelter to keep them warm and make sure that they have access to unfrozen water.**

### **Checklist**

- Insulate walls and attic.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
- Insulate any water lines that run along outer walls (water will be less likely to freeze).
- Service snow-removal equipment.
- Have chimney and flue inspected.
- Install easy-to-read outdoor thermometer.

### **Prepare Your Car**

You can avoid many dangerous winter travel problems by planning ahead. Have maintenance service on your vehicle as often as the manufacturer recommends. In addition, every fall:

- Have the radiator system serviced, or check the antifreeze level yourself with an antifreeze tester. Add antifreeze, as needed.
- Replace windshield-wiper fluid with a wintertime mixture.
- Replace any worn tires, and check the air pressure in the tires.
- During winter, keep the gas tank near full to help avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.

### **Checklist**

Keep your car fueled and in good working order. Be sure to check the following:

- Antifreeze
- Windshield wiper fluid (wintertime mixture)
- Heater
- Brakes
- Ignition
- Emergency flashers
- Exhaust
- Tires (air pressure and wear)
- Fuel
- Oil
- Brake fluid
- Defroster
- Battery
- Radiator

### **Communications**

Stock up on emergency supplies for communication, food, safety, heating, and car in case a storm hits.

### **Communications Checklist**

Make sure you have at least one of the following in case there is a power failure:

- Battery-powered radio (for listening to local emergency instructions). Have extra batteries.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio receiver (for listening to National Weather Service broadcasts). See [www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr) for more information.
- Find out how your community warns the public about severe weather:
  - Siren
  - Radio stations
  - Television stations
- Listen to emergency broadcasts.
- Know what winter storm warning terms mean:
  - Winter weather advisory: expect winter weather conditions to cause inconvenience and hazards.
  - Frost/freeze warning: expect below-freezing temperatures.
  - Winter storm watch: be alert; a storm is likely.
  - Winter storm warning: take action; the storm is in or entering the area.
  - Blizzard warning: seek refuge immediately! Snow and strong winds, near-zero visibility, deep snow drifts, and life-threatening wind chill.

### **Food, Water, Heat and Safety**

#### **Food and Safety Checklist**

**Have a week's worth of food and safety supplies. If you live far from other people, have more supplies on hand!**

- Drinking water
- Canned/no-cook food (bread, crackers, dried fruits)
- Non-electric can opener
- Baby food and formula (if baby in the household)
- Prescription drugs and other medicine
- First-aid kit
- Rock-salt to melt ice on walkways
- Supply of cat litter or bag of sand to add traction on walkways
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery-powered lamps or lanterns  
(To prevent the risk of fire, avoid using candles.)

#### **Water Checklist**

Keep a water supply. Extreme cold can cause water pipes in your home to freeze and sometimes break.

- Leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.

- Keep the indoor temperature warm.
- Allow more heated air near pipes. Open kitchen cabinet doors under the kitchen sink.
- If your pipes do freeze, do not thaw them with a torch. Thaw the pipes slowly with warm air from an electric hair dryer.
- If you cannot thaw your pipes, or if the pipes have broken open, use bottled water or get water from a neighbor's home.
- Keep several days of bottled water on hand.
- In an emergency – if no other water is available – snow can be melted for water. Bringing water to a rolling boil for one minute will kill most germs but won't get rid of chemicals sometimes found in snow.

### **Heating Checklist**

Have at least one of the following heat sources in case the power goes out:

- Fireplace with plenty of dry firewood or gas log fireplace
- Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters
- Check with your local fire department to make sure that kerosene heaters are legal in your area.
- Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- Use electric space heaters with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements.
- Keep heat sources at least 3 feet away from furniture and drapes.
- Never leave children unattended near a space heater.

**Never use an electric generator indoors, inside the garage, or near the air intake of your home because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning:**

- Do not use the generator or appliances if they are wet.
- Do not store gasoline indoors where the fumes could ignite.
- Use individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords to plug in other appliances.

Have the following safety equipment:

- Chemical fire extinguisher
- Smoke alarm in working order (Check once a month and change batteries twice a year.)
- Carbon monoxide detector

### **Cooking and Lighting Checklist**

- **Never use charcoal grills or portable gas camp stove indoors—the fumes are deadly!**
- Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns.
- Avoid using candles.
- Never leave lit candles alone.

### **Car and Emergency Checklist**

- Cell phone; portable charger and extra batteries
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper
- Battery-powered radio (and extra batteries)
- Flashlight (and extra batteries)
- Water
- Snack food
- Extra hats, coats, mittens
- Blankets
- Chains or rope
- Tire chains
- Canned compressed air with sealant (emergency tire repair)
- Road salt and sand
- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- Bright colored flag; help signs
- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- Road maps
- Compass
- Waterproof matches and a can (to melt snow for water)
- Paper towels

**If you are in a life-threatening situation call 9-1-1. To contact service agencies for assistance call 2-1-1.**