

## **Be Prepared to Stay Safe and Healthy in Winter**

Winter storms and cold temperatures can be dangerous. Stay safe and healthy by planning ahead. Prepare your home and cars. Prepare for power outages and outdoor activity. Check on older adults.

Although winter comes as no surprise, many of us are not ready for its arrival. If you are prepared for the hazards of winter, you will be more likely to stay safe and healthy when temperatures start to fall.

### **Take These Steps for Your Home**

Many people prefer to remain indoors during winter, but staying inside is no guarantee of safety. Take these steps to keep your home safe and warm during the winter months.

- Winterize your home.
  - Install weather stripping, insulation, and storm windows.
  - Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls.
  - Clean out gutters and repair roof leaks.
- Check your heating systems.
  - Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure that it is clean, working properly, and ventilated to the outside.
  - Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys.
  - Install a smoke detector. Test batteries monthly and replace them twice a year.
  - Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available.
  - Prevent carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies.
    - Install a CO detector to alert you of the presence of the deadly, odorless, colorless gas. Check batteries when you change your clocks in the fall and spring.
    - Learn symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

## **Don't Forget to Prepare Your Car**

Get your car ready for cold weather use before winter arrives.

- Service the radiator and maintain antifreeze level; check tire tread or, if necessary, replace tires with all-weather or snow tires.
  - Keep gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
  - Use a wintertime formula in your windshield washer.
  - Prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. The kit should include:
    - cell phone, portable charger, and extra batteries;
    - blankets;
    - food and water;
    - booster cables, flares, tire pump, and a bag of sand or cat litter (for traction);
    - compass and maps;
    - flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries;
    - first-aid kit; and
    - plastic bags (for sanitation).

## **Equip in Advance for Emergencies**

**Be prepared for weather-related emergencies, including power outages.**

- Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration and water stored in clean containers.
- Ensure that your cell phone is fully charged.
- When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions.
- Keep an up-to-date emergency kit, including:
  - Battery-operated devices, such as a flashlight, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, and lamps;
  - extra batteries;
  - first-aid kit and extra medicine;
  - baby items; and
  - cat litter or sand for icy walkways.
- Protect your family from carbon monoxide.
  - Keep grills, camp stoves, and generators out of the house, basement and garage.

- Locate generators at least 20 feet from any window, door, or vent and in a space where rain and snow will not reach them.
- Leave your home immediately if the CO detector sounds and call 911.

### **Extreme Cold Preparedness for Children** ([Adapted from American Academy of Pediatrics Website](#))

Because children are less able to regulate their body temperature than adults, exposure to extreme cold can quickly lead to dangerously low body temperatures (i.e., hypothermia). Newborn infants are prone to hypothermia because of their large body surface area, small amount of subcutaneous fat, and decreased ability to shiver. Children and adults respond to cold extremes by shivering, developing "goose bumps," and experiencing lethargy and a slow heart rate. Eventually, the shivering ends, and disorientation and lack of responsiveness occur. Severe hypothermia can also result in an abnormal beating of the heart (i.e., arrhythmia).

### **The following steps can help to protect your body from cold extremes and their consequences:**

- Wear proper cold-weather gear.
- Avoid severe cold.
- Find alternate shelter if the home or residence has lost its heat.
- Use safe indoor heating sources.
  - Ensure that all stoves and fireplaces are adequately vented
  - Do not use charcoal indoors.
  - Do not use gasoline or diesel generators indoors or outside near an open window or vent that could bring in fumes.
  - Locate generators at least 20 feet from any window, door, or vent and in a space where rain and snow will not reach them.

### **Take These Precautions Outdoors**

Many people spend time outdoors in the winter working, traveling, or enjoying winter sports. Outdoor activities can expose you to several safety hazards, but you can take these steps to prepare for them:

- Wear appropriate outdoor clothing: wear a tightly woven, preferably wind-resistant coat or jacket; inner layers of light, warm clothing; mittens; hats;

scarves; and waterproof boots.

- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches.
- Learn safety precautions to follow when outdoors.
  - Work slowly when doing outside chores.
  - Take a buddy and an emergency kit when you are participating in outdoor recreation.
  - Carry a cell phone.

## **Do This When You Plan to Travel**

When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions.

- Avoid traveling when the weather service has issued advisories.
- If you must travel, inform a friend or relative of your proposed route and expected time of arrival.
- Follow these safety rules if you become stranded in your car.
  - Make your car visible to rescuers. Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna, raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing), and turn on the inside overhead lights (when your engine is running).
  - Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area. Stay with your car unless safety is no more than 100 yards away.
  - Keep your body warm. Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers. Huddle with other people if you can.
  - Stay awake and stay moving. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems. As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve circulation and stay warmer.
  - Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Above all, be ready to check on family and neighbors who are especially at risk from cold weather hazards: young children, older adults, and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

No one can stop the onset of winter. However, if you follow these suggestions, you will be ready for it when it comes.

Be sure to visit CDC's [Winter Weather](#) webpage for more winter weather safety tips.

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