

## BE PREPARED FOR WINTER WEATHER

### **STAYING SAFE AND HEALTHY DURING WINTER WEATHER**

- When bad winter weather strikes Pennsylvania – especially snow, cold temperatures or high winds – try to stay indoors as much as possible.
- If you have to go outside, keep your trips brief and follow the tips in this section.

### **Monitor Body Temperature**

- Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outdoors, can cause serious or life-threatening health problems.
- Infants and older Pennsylvanians are more at risk to serious cold-related health problems.
  - Infants:
    - Infants less than one-year old should never sleep in a cold room because (1) infants lose body heat more easily than adults; and (2) unlike adults, infants can't make enough body heat by shivering.
    - Provide warm clothing for infants and try to maintain a warm indoor temperature. If the temperature cannot be maintained, make temporary arrangements to stay elsewhere.
  - Older Pennsylvanians:
    - Older adults often make less body heat because of a slower metabolism and less physical activity. If you are over 65 years of age, check the temperature in your home often during severely cold weather.
    - Also, check on older friends and neighbors frequently to ensure that their homes are adequately heated.
- The most common cold-related problems are hypothermia and frostbite.

### **Hypothermia (unusually low body temperature):**

- When you have hypothermia, it affects your brain and prevents you from thinking clearly or moving well. That is why hypothermia is so dangerous – you may not even know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.
- Hypothermia usually occurs at very cold temperatures, but can also happen even at cool temperatures above 40 degrees Fahrenheit if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat or from being in cold water.
- Victims of hypothermia are most often:
  - Older people with too little food, clothing or heating;
  - Babies sleeping in cold bedrooms;
  - Children left unattended;
  - Adults under the influence of alcohol;
  - Individuals with emotional disabilities; and
  - People who remain outdoors for long periods.

### **Hypothermia Warning Signs:**

- Adults:
  - shivering/exhaustion
  - confusion/fumbling hands

- memory loss/slurred speech
- drowsiness
- Infants:
  - bright red, cold skin
  - very low energy
- If you think someone may have hypothermia, take their temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, get immediate medical attention.

**Frostbite (injury to the body caused by exposure to very cold temperatures):**

- Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation.

**Frostbite Warning Signs:**

- At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin – you may be getting frostbite. If you have any of the following signs, it might be frostbite:
  - a white or grayish-yellow skin area
  - skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
  - numbness
- If you see someone with frostbite symptoms, make sure that person gets medical care.

**Dress Warmly and Stay Dry when Working or Playing Outdoors:**

- Adults and children should wear:
  - A hat;
  - A scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth;
  - Sleeves that are snug at the wrist;
  - Mittens (they are warmer than gloves);
  - Water-resistant coat and boots; and
  - Several layers of loose-fitting clothing.
- Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce losing body-heat. Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton.
- Stay dry – wet clothing chills the body quickly. Excess sweat will increase heat loss too, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm.
- Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Shivering is a sign it's time to return indoors.

**Shovel Snow Safely**

- Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold.
- If you have to do heavy outdoor chores, dress warmly and work slowly. Remember, your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so don't overdo it.
- Additional tips to make snow shoveling safer:

- Warm up your muscles with 10 minutes of light exercise and stretching;
  - Dress appropriately;
  - Consider shoveling in shifts instead of all at once;
  - Take breaks and drink water to prevent dehydration;
  - Use a shovel that is correctly sized for your body;
  
  - When possible, push snow instead of lifting it. If you must lift, bend your legs and not your back;
  - Avoid twisting motions that can stress your back; and
  - If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or other symptoms of a heart attack, seek immediate medical care or call 9-1-1.
- If using a snow blower, be sure to read and follow all safety instructions and stay aware of others who may be nearby.

### **Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

- When power outages occur during winter storms, the use of other sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling or cooking can cause carbon monoxide (CO) to build up in a home, garage or camper and poison the people and animals inside.
  
- CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those made by small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, lanterns and gas ranges, or by burning charcoal and wood.
  
- How to recognize CO poisoning:
  - Exposure to CO can cause loss of consciousness and death
  - The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are:
    - Headache;
    - Dizziness;
    - Weakness;
    - Nausea;
    - Vomiting;
    - Chest pain; and
    - Confusion.
  - People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever having symptoms.
  
- Important CO poisoning prevention tips:
  - Never use a gas range or oven to heat a home.
  - Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
  - Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window, door or vent where exhaust can come into an enclosed area.
  - Never run a generator, pressure washer or any gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented. Keep vents and flues free of debris, especially if winds are high. Flying debris can block ventilation lines.
  - Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern or portable camping stove inside a home, garage or camper.
  - If conditions are too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter.
  - If CO poisoning is suspected, call a healthcare professional right away.

### **Stock Up on Emergency Supplies**

- An emergency supply kit is a vital part of emergency preparedness. If you already have emergency supply kits, check them before winter weather strikes to make sure nothing has expired and you have everything you might need.
- Following are some of the basic items you should include in the kit for your home, vehicle and workplace.
- For your home:
  - General basic items:
    - Bottled water (each person in your family needs at least one gallon every day for drinking and bathing)
    - At least a three-day supply of foods that won't spoil and don't need to be heated
    - Battery-powered radio and extra batteries
    - Flashlight and extra batteries
    - First aid kit
  - For children:
    - Baby formula/food and bottles for at least three days
    - Diapers for at least three days
    - Extra set of clothing
  - For adults:
    - One-week minimum supply of prescription medicines
    - Denture needs
    - Extra contact lenses (and supplies)/eyeglasses
  - For people with special needs and older Pennsylvanians:
    - One-week minimum supply of prescription medicines
    - Medical equipment and information on how it's used and extra batteries
    - Extra eyeglasses, contacts and hearing aids/batteries
  - For pets/service animals:
    - At least three days' worth of pet food, bottled water and supplies
    - Medications (for at least three days) and medical records (including vet info)
    - Microchip, tattoo number or photo to help identify your pet
  - Important documents folder in water-proof container
    - Copies of:
      - Medicare/Medicaid and health insurance cards
      - Copies of birth certificates
      - Copies of drivers' licenses and vehicle registration information
      - Copies of homeowner and car insurance

To view/print the complete home supply kit checklist visit [www.ReadyPA.org](http://www.ReadyPA.org).

- For your vehicle:
  - Cellular phone and charger
  - Enough water and food that won't spoil for at least three days
  - Blanket, extra clothing and gloves
  - First aid kit
  - Sand or cat litter to use as traction if you get stuck in the snow/ice

To view/print the complete vehicle supply kit checklist visit [www.ReadyPA.org](http://www.ReadyPA.org).

- For your workplace:
  - Enough bottled water and food that won't spoil for at least one day
  - Extra clothes and a blanket
  - Medications
  - Personal hygiene items (like a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.)
  - Extra glasses, contacts and supplies

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