



Cold Weather Safety

Keeping Yourself Warm and Safe

With the winter months hitting their stride in New England, and the likelihood of severe weather increasing, we thought we'd take a moment to review some basic safety tips for how to prepare your home, your vehicle, your family, and yourself to stay warm and safe in cold weather, whether it be from common cold weather to a more severe winter storm.

Preparing Your Home

The first step in staying warm during the winter months is ensuring that your home is safe and capable of maintaining heat. This includes a number of steps, some of which are outlined below as a minimum baseline:

- Install weatherstripping, insulation, and storm windows
- Make sure water lines on exterior walls are properly insulated
- Repair any roof leaks and make sure gutters are clean
- Have your heating system professionally inspected and cleaned yearly (such as chimney, fireplace, vents, etc.)
- Make sure you have a safe alternative heat source as a back-up, as well as properly stored fuel for said heat source
- Install smoke detectors inside each bedroom, outside every sleeping area, and on every level of the home including the basement. Check the batteries monthly and replace batteries twice a year
- Install and test carbon monoxide alarms, checking and replacing the batteries when you change the clocks in spring and fall
- Watch for signs of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion
- Make sure you have an emergency kit ready to go in case of a winter storm. For more information about preparing emergency kits, refer to the Monthly Health Tips for September 2022 – Emergency Preparedness
- Prepare lights in case of electrical failure. Ideally, use flashlights instead of candles. If candles are used, make sure they are only lit when supervised by an adult
- If using portable space heaters, make sure they are kept at least 3 feet away from flammable materials (like curtains or drapes). Do not cover your portable space heaters
- In the event of a power outage and a loss of heat, close off unused rooms, use towels to fill in cracks of doors to prevent loss of heat, and huddle together for warmth. Make sure to cover your entire body in warm clothing and blankets



Preparing Your Vehicle

Just like your home, if you drive a car, you should make sure you've adequately prepared it for the winter season. Snow, sleet, and ice can cause adverse driving conditions, and in an emergency, it is always best to be prepared. Here are some tips:

- Make sure your car has adequate antifreeze. Test it and refill if necessary
- Use wintertime mixture for windshield wiper fluid. **Do not melt ice or snow off of your windshield with hot water.** This can cause the windshield to shatter
- Make sure your tires are properly serviced and have adequate air pressure
- To avoid ice forming in the tank and fuel lines, keep your gas tank topped off whenever possible
- Make sure your car is in good working order: check the defrosters, brake fluids, oil, brakes, ignition, emergency lights, exhaust, and battery
- Keep an emergency kit available in your car, such as a flashlight, first aid kit, and adequate blankets and warm clothing in case you are stranded, or the car breaks down. See the car safety link for more details in the References section at the end of this health tip
- If you are stranded in your car in severe weather/cold, you can do the following:
 - Make the vehicle visible to rescuers (such as by tying brightly colored cloth to the antennae if applicable, or keeping your hood open if isn't snowing)
 - Keep your body warm. Wrap yourself in warm clothing, hats, scarves, blankets, even newspaper. Make sure to cover your whole body if possible, including the head. Huddle with other people if you are not alone
 - Keep yourself moving for better circulation. While seated, keep moving your arms and legs to stay warmer
 - Run the motor/heater for 10 minutes out of every hour. Crack open the window slightly for air, and make sure that your exhaust pipe is not blocked by snow to prevent CO poisoning



Health and Safety

Remember, severe cold can be just as dangerous as severe heat. Like with extreme heat, certain people are more vulnerable to severe cold than others. Infants small size and limited body heat makes them more susceptible to the cold. Make sure to keep your infants adequately dressed and warm. If necessary, hold them close to share body heat if your power is out and no form of heat is available, but make sure to take precautions to avoid rolling onto them or injuring them if you should fall asleep.

Likewise, those who are elderly may be more susceptible, since their metabolisms are slower and they may be less active. Check in on elderly neighbors to make sure they have adequate heat, and make sure to keep elderly family members warm.

Follow some of these additional tips:

- Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages, as they can make you more susceptible to heat loss
 - Drink warm, sweet drinks, but consult your doctor if you have any dietary restrictions or medical needs
- Minimize time spent outside. Dress in layers, and make sure as little of your skin is exposed to the cold as possible
- Avoid strenuous activity and exhaustion when shoveling snow. Your body is working overtime to stay warm, and pushing yourself too hard can increase the risk of heart problems and high blood pressure
- See below for how to handle Frostbite and Hypothermia

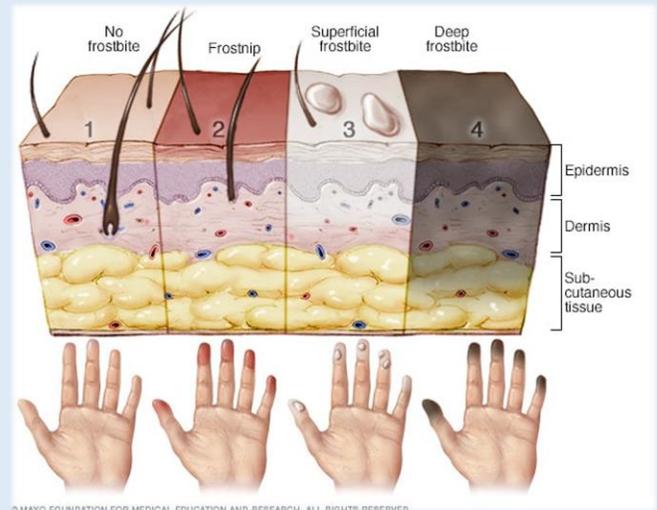


Frostbite and Hypothermia

The two greatest dangers from severe cold are frostbite and hypothermia. Frostbite is caused by prolonged exposure to the cold, and it impacts your circulation. It most commonly affects the extremities, such as hands, feet, ears, nose, etc.

- It can start with redness or pain to the skin. Get out of the cold if this occurs
- It can also produce white or grayish color to the skin, give it an oddly firm or waxy feel, and lead to numbness
- You may not immediately realize you have frostbite due to the numbness
- Don't wait! Seek medical care immediately if you develop frostbite to avoid long-term injury
- If medical care is unavailable, and the individual does not display any symptoms of hypothermia, you can do the following:
 - Get the person into a warm room as soon as possible
 - Unless there is no other choice, do not walk on feet or toes with signs of frostbite, as this can increase the damage

- Do not rub or massage the affected area
- Put the affected areas in warm (not hot) water, which is a comfortable temperature to other parts of the body
- If no hot water is available, use body heat (such as the heat of an armpit to warm frostbitten fingers)
- Do not use a heating pad, stove, heat lamp, or other such heat sources, as the affected area is numb and thus more susceptible to burns



Hypothermia is another medical condition which can occur from prolonged exposure to cold. This is a dangerous lowering of a person's body temperature. It can result in the following:

- Shivering
- Exhaustion, or feeling tired
- Confusion
- Fumbling hands
- Memory loss
- Drowsiness
- Slurred speech
- In infants, it results in bright red, cold skin and low energy

Like frostbite, **don't wait!** If a person's body temperature is below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, seek immediate medical attention

- If medical attention is not immediately available, you may do the following:
 - Get the person into a warm room or shelter
 - Remove any wet clothing the person is wearing
 - Warm the center of the person's body, such as the chest, neck, head, and groin, using an electric blanket if available. If not, use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets
 - Warm drinks can help increase body temperature. Avoid alcohol. Do not give drinks to a person if they have fallen unconscious
 - Once body temperature has increased, cover their body in a warm blanket (including their head and neck) and make sure to keep them dry
 - Seek medical attention as soon as it becomes available

To learn more about the dangers of severe cold and what you can do to protect yourself and your friends and family, see the links listed below. Make sure to stay warm this winter, and stay safe!

References

CDC Winter Readiness Infographic -

https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/documents/BeReady_Winter.pdf

CDC Winter Health Webpage -

<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/features/winterweather/index.html#:~:text=Wrap%20your%20entire%20body%2C%20including,to%20cold%2Drelated%20health%20problems>

CDC Winter Weather Webpage - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/index.html>

CDC Emergency Kit Infographic - https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/00_docs/Emergency-kit-infographic_508.pdf

CDC Frostbite and Hypothermia Infographic -

https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/documents/hypothermia-frostbite_508.pdf

CDC Frostbite and Hypothermia Webpage -

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/hypothermia.html>

CDC Winter Storm Preparation Webpage -

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/beforestorm/preparehome.html#Car>

FEMA Winter Weather Webpage - <https://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>

CDC Winter Storm Safety Webpage -

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/duringstorm/indoorsafety.html>

Car Readiness Webpage - <https://www.ready.gov/car>

CDC Power Outage Safety Webpage -

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/poweroutage/needtoknow.html>