

## Winter Weather Safety Messaging

With the winter weather comes hazards that could put the health and safety of our residents at risk. Here are messages that we can share with our communities to prevent winter weather mishaps:

### Outdoor Safety

Many injuries associated with cold weather result from slips and falls outdoors. To enjoy the outdoors and stay safe:

- Avoid ice. Keep walkways and steps free from as much ice as possible by using a professional chemical de-icing compound, rock salt, or sand.
- Do not leave areas of skin exposed to the cold.
- Avoid exertion as it can lead to perspiring and becoming overtired. Remember to hydrate often when spending time in cold weather.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs and avoid caffeinated beverages.
- Avoid getting wet as this can lead to hypothermia.
- Watch carefully for signs of health problems related to cold-weather.

For more information on how to stay safe outdoors in cold weather, visit:

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

### Cold weather safety

Cold temperatures can cause the body to lose heat faster than it is produced, which can lead to serious health problems such as frostbite and hypothermia. Signs of frostbite include loss of feeling in extremities and white or pale appearance. Hypothermia may show signs of uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, memory loss, incoherence, slurred speech, exhaustion, and drowsiness. Populations at highest risk of these health problems include people 65 and older, infants, children, people who spend time outdoors for long periods of time, and people who drink alcohol in excess or use illicit drugs. To protect against these health problems:

- Wear layers of lightweight, loose-fitting, warm, dry clothing, and remember to include a hat, scarf, and mittens.
- Make sure body parts most often affected by frostbite are covered (nose, ears, toes, cheeks, chin, fingers)
- Cover your mouth to help protect your lungs from the extreme cold.
- Limit time outside during cold temperatures and seek shelter in a warm, dry place
- Check on others who might be at risk for cold weather-related illness
- Seek care if hypothermia or frostbite is suspected.

For more information, including the signs and symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia, visit:

[www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/index.html)

<https://www.weather.gov/media/aly/PSAs/ExtremeCold.pdf>

[https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/documents/hypothermia-frostbite\\_508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/documents/hypothermia-frostbite_508.pdf)

### Carbon monoxide safety

In 2017, 227 people required emergency department care for unintentional, non-fire related carbon monoxide poisoning in North Carolina. Carbon monoxide (CO), an odorless, colorless gas, which can cause sudden illness and death. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are, dizziness, upset

## Winter Weather Safety Messaging

stomach, headache, weakness, vomiting, confusion, and chest pain. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- If your heat goes out, close off rooms that you do not need to use, dress in lightweight layers of clothing, and make sure to wear a hat to preserve heat indoors.
- Never use a gas-powered generator or other fuel-burning appliances indoors or in the garage
- Never use charcoal grills or propane stoves indoors, even in a fireplace
- Never use a gas oven to heat a home, even for a short amount of time
- Install a carbon monoxide alarm with an Underwriters Laboratory UL™ listing on each level of a home and near all sleeping areas. Carefully follow the directions to ensure proper alarm placement and check the batteries regularly.
- Replace alarms more than seven years old or when end-of-service indicator chirps
- Evacuate and call 9-1-1 if a carbon monoxide alarm sounds

For more information on how to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, visit

<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oea/z/co.html> and  
<https://www.weather.gov/media/aly/PSAs/ExtremeCold.pdf>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/co/default.htm>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>

### Travel Safety

Travelling in winter weather can be extremely hazardous. Avoid going out, and follow the guidance of authorities. If you must travel, be cautious and:

- Listen for reports on the radio or television regarding travel advisories issued by the National Weather Service.
- Do not travel if conditions make it hard to see.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, and overpasses or bridges if at all possible.
- Use tire chains and make sure to have a mobile phone with you at all times.
- If you have ice or snow on your windshield, never pour water on it as a removal tool. Your windshield could shatter.
- Always carry additional warm clothing in case the car breaks down.

If you become stranded while traveling, stay in your vehicle. It is often the safest choice if visibility is low or roads are covered in ice. To stay safe while stranded, you should:

- Use a brightly colored cloth to tie around the antenna of your car (if you have one) and raise the hood of your car (if it is not snowing).
- Move anything that you need that is stored in your trunk to the passenger area of your car.
- Use extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers to wrap your entire body (including your head).
- Stay awake as sleeping can make you more vulnerable to cold-related health problems.
- Run the motor and heater for about 10 minutes every hour, make sure to open one window slightly to let fresh air in. Check to make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe of the car. Doing so will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- As you sit in your vehicle, move your arms and legs frequently to improve circulation and help you to stay warmer.

## Winter Weather Safety Messaging

- Avoid eating unmelted snow as this can lower your body temperature.
- If there is more than one person in the car, huddle together for warmth.

For more information on how to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, visit:

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

### **Food safety without power**

When power is lost, all refrigerated and frozen food should be evaluated before being used or refrozen. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration offers the following food safety information for anticipated power outages:

Frozen, partially thawed food is safe to cook or refreeze if it still contains ice crystals or has not risen above 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep refrigerated foods at or below 41 degrees Fahrenheit and frozen food at or below zero degrees Fahrenheit.

Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed.

### **Low-income services**

For many of North Carolina's most vulnerable residents, meeting the expense of household heating during the cold of winter may be a challenge. County departments of social services are accepting applications for the state's [Low-Income Energy Assistance Program](#), which provides one-time federal heating payment assistance to those who qualify. The program provided approximately \$3 million to help more than 128,000 households pay their heating bills from December 2017 to March 2018.

Funds are available until March 31 or until funds are exhausted. County departments of social services can provide more information on eligibility and how to apply:

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dss/local-county-social-services-offices>.

Additionally, The federally funded [Crisis Intervention Program](#) has approximately \$30 million available to families who need emergency help heating their homes. The program helps households with low incomes who have a life-threatening or health-related emergency due to a lack of heating. Each household is individually evaluated, and if determined eligible for assistance, payments are made directly to the household's heating vendor.

To apply, individuals should contact their [county department of social services](#).

### **Flu season**

So far this flu season, there have been [five flu-related deaths](#) reported to the Division of Public Health. Flu can be a serious illness, especially for adults older than 65, children younger than 5, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart disease. Flu usually comes on suddenly, and people who are sick with flu often feel some or all of these symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (not everyone experiences a fever)

## Winter Weather Safety Messaging

- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/index.html>

The Department of Health and Human Services encourages vaccinations for everyone 6 months and older, and the following precautions to protect against the spread of flu and other viruses during the winter months:

- Stay home when sick until fever-free for at least 24 hours
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and then discard the tissue promptly
- Wash hands frequently, preferably with soap and water

For more information on how to prepare for winter-related events, download the free ReadyNC app, or visit [www.readync.org](http://www.readync.org) for real-time traffic and weather conditions, open shelters and items needed in emergency supply kits.