

Cook County Department of Public Health

Cook County Health & Hospitals System

(formerly Cook County Bureau of Health Services)

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Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) Urges Residents to Stay Safe During Cold Weather

Although winter has not yet officially arrived, the colder weather is a reminder that snow, falling temperatures and slippery conditions will soon be upon us, taking a toll on our health and safety.

“Heavy snow and ice, cold temperatures and winds can lead to health issues such as frostbite, heart problems or injuries,” said CCDPH chief operating officer, Stephen A. Martin, Jr., Ph.D., M.P.H. “The elderly can be particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. Check on elderly neighbors or relatives often to make sure they are safe.”

CCDPH is advising residents to use common sense and follow these safety suggestions this winter season:

Dress for the cold:

- Wear a warm hat, and keep feet and hands warm and dry.
- Cover as much of your face as possible while outside, breathe through a scarf to warm air before it enters your lungs.
- Wear several layers of lightweight clothing, rather than one or two layers of heavy garments. The air between the garments acts as insulation to keep the body warmer.

Avoid injury:

- Use salt, sand, kitty litter or other substances with ice melting properties to reduce slip and fall accidents.
- When shoveling, use a sturdy, lightweight shovel and lift with your legs not your back.
- Always try to push snow rather than lift it.
- Shoveling snow can be strenuous on the heart; rest often and pace yourself. Stop shoveling and call 911 if you have discomfort or heaviness in the chest, arms or neck, unusual or prolonged shortness of breath, a dizzy or faint feeling or excessive sweating or nausea and vomiting.

Keep your vehicle prepared:

- Allow extra time when traveling. Monitor weather conditions carefully and adhere to travel advisories.
- Keep a winter storm kit in your car. This should include blankets, food, flares, chains, gloves and first aid supplies.

Stay prepared at home:

- Do not use an oven as a heating device. Read directions before using space heaters and other portable heating units.
- Make sure cracks in windows and doors are repaired. For a quick fix, use towels, rugs or newspapers.
- Have bottled water, canned foods, flashlights and batteries on hand in case a winter storm keeps you indoors.
- Residents who have no heat should check with their local municipality or township about warming centers.

Stay healthy:

- Recognize the symptoms of hypothermia: confusion, dizziness, exhaustion and severe shivering. Seek medical attention immediately if you have these symptoms.
- Recognize frostbite warning signs: gray, white or yellow skin discoloration, numbness, waxy feeling skin. Seek medical attention immediately if you have these symptoms.
- Drink warm, caffeine-free, non-alcoholic beverages to stay warm and hydrated.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about medications that could cause problems in cold weather.

For more information contact CCDPH at 708-492-2000.

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