

LDRNY

Lutheran Disaster Response
of New York

Winter Weather: Health and Safety Tips

Tips for Staying Warm

Exposure to cold can cause life-threatening health conditions. Avoid serious conditions such as frostbite and hypothermia, by keeping warm.

- Wear a hat, hood or scarf, as most heat is lost through the head.
- Wear layers, as they provide better insulation and warmth.
- Keep clothing dry; if a layer becomes wet, remove it.

Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite can affect any portion of the body exposed to the cold temperatures — typically fingers, toes, ears and the nose — and its symptoms include a loss of feeling and white or pale appearance. Warm affected areas but avoid extreme sources of heat.

Hypothermia, a potentially life-threatening condition in which body temperature drops below 96°F, can produce symptoms including uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness, cool or pale skin, blue lips and numbness.

- If you suspect a person is suffering from frostbite or hypothermia, bring him or her someplace warm and seek medical help immediately.
- If medical help is unavailable, rewarm the person, starting at the core of their body. Warming arms and legs first can increase circulation of cold blood to the heart which can lead to heart failure. Use a blanket, or if necessary, your own body heat to warm the person.
- Do not give a person suffering frostbite or hypothermia alcohol or caffeine, both of which can worsen the condition. Instead, give them a cup of warm broth.

Learn more about the [medical hazards](#) associated with exposure.

Snow Removal Safety Tips:

Take care in removing snow and ice not to put yourself or others at risk.

- **Stretch before you go out.** If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. This may prevent injury.

- **Cover your mouth.** Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors.
- **Avoid overexertion.** Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unfamiliar exercise, such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Take frequent rest breaks, and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- **Keep dry.** Change wet clothes frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- **Stay safe.** Walk carefully on snowy or icy sidewalks. If using a snowblower, NEVER use your hands to unclog the machine.
- **Maintain an awareness of utilities when shoveling snow.** Do not cover fire hydrants with snow when clearing sidewalks and driveways. Do not shovel snow into manholes and catch basins.
- **Help those who may require special assistance,** including infants, the elderly and infirm, and people with disabilities.

Safe Home Heating Tips:

Winter weather can also lead to death and injury resulting from the improper use of portable heating equipment. If you lose power or gas service, or otherwise have inadequate central heating, be sure you are taking necessary precautions when heating your home.

- Use portable heating equipment that is approved for indoor use.
- Keep combustible materials, including furniture, drapes, and carpeting at least three feet away from the heat source.
- Always keep an eye on the equipment. Never leave children alone in the room where a space heater is running. Turn it off when you are unable to closely monitor it.
- Dry mittens, gloves, socks, and scarves in a clothes dryer. NEVER drape them over a space heater to dry.

For more information on how to properly and safely heat your home, please review "[Using Heaters in the Colder Weather](#)" on the Fire Department's Fire Safety website.

If You Lose Power or Heat:

Tenants without adequate heat or hot water should first speak with the building owner or manager. If the problem is not corrected, dial 311. For more information about loss of heat or hot water, refer to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's [frequently asked questions](#) for tenants.

Senior citizens living on fixed incomes can call 311 for information about the Department for the Aging's Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), a program designed to help ease the impact of New York's steeply rising home heating costs

on seniors.

If you lose heat, take measures to trap existing warm air, and safely stay warm until heat returns:

- Insulate your home as much as possible. Hang blankets over windows and doorways and stay in a well-insulated room while power is out.
- Dress warmly. Wear hats, scarves, gloves and layered clothing.
- If you have a working fireplace, use it for heat and light, but be sure to keep the damper open for ventilation.
- Do not burn charcoal indoors and do not use your kitchen gas range to heat rooms as this can lead to fire or a hazardous smoke condition. Read more about [risks from carbon monoxide](#).

If you lose power, call your power provider immediately to report the outage:

- Con Edison 24-hour hotline: 1-800-75-CONED (752-6633)
- KeySpan 24-hour hotline: 1-718-643-4050

In extreme situations, the City may open shelters for residents forced from their homes for extended periods of time. Read more about [power outage preparedness](#).

If you lose hot water, open your faucets to a steady drip so pipes do not freeze.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:

Carbon monoxide poisoning is another hazard posed by improper use or maintenance of heating equipment. Sources of carbon monoxide include improperly vented furnaces, plugged or cracked chimneys, water heaters, fireplaces, stoves, gas-burning heaters and generators.

Symptoms: HEADACHE is the most common symptom of carbon monoxide poisoning. Other symptoms include dizziness, nausea, headache and sleepiness.

Carbon Monoxide Winter Safety Tips:

- Do not use any fuel-burning equipment indoors.
- Purchase and install a carbon monoxide detector for your home.
- Check your vehicle's exhaust pipe before starting it to ensure it is clear of snow.

For more information, review our [overview of the risks from carbon monoxide](#).