



Winter Weather/Extreme Cold Preparedness

Winter storms are often called “deceptive killers” because most deaths that occur are indirectly related to the actual storm. The most common causes of deaths during winter weather are motor vehicle accidents, heart attacks (caused by over exertion while shoveling snow or ice), or asphyxiation from heating sources that are not properly ventilated or are not approved sources of heat.

Before a Winter Storm/Extreme Cold Hits:

- Make a Disaster-Supply Kit.
- Practice your Family Emergency Communications Plan.
- Make sure you can heat at least one room in your home if power or furnace is not available.
- Make sure your home is properly insulated. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows to keep the cold out.
- Install storm windows.
- Insulate water pipes to keep them from freezing.
- Know how to shut off water valves.
- Make sure your car’s tires have enough tread on them. Consider installing winter tires.
- Practice safe winter driving.
- Consider purchasing and installing a generator in case there is an extended power outage. Make sure the generator is installed by a certified professional.
- Be aware of parking bans as some communities may issue one prior to a winter storm event.



During a Winter Storm/Extreme Cold Hits:

- Know the symptoms and treatments for cold-related illnesses.
- Watch for ice that can cause falls, leading to injury.
- Indoor temperatures should be set according to activity level, health and medications. A safe, fuel-saving temperature for a young, active family may be dangerous for an older person who has trouble moving or is taking certain medications.
- Wear a coat, hat, scarf, and gloves when heading outdoors. Limit the exposure of your skin to the cold.
- Dress warmly while inside, especially if you are not physically active. Avoid drinking alcohol as it can lower the body’s ability to keep warm.
- If you experience an emergency that requires fire, police, or medical assistance, dial 911.

After a Winter Storm:

- Check on elderly family, friends and neighbors frequently. The elderly are especially susceptible to extremely cold temperatures.
- Be careful when shoveling snow. Take frequent breaks and stay hydrated to avoid overexertion.
- Do not run your vehicle until the exhaust pipes has been cleared of snow.
- Remove all snow from your car before driving. It’s the law. See RIGL § 31-23-16 for details.
- Make sure nearby fire hydrants and storm drains are free from snow.
- Take note that parking bans may still be in effect.
- Safely reduce the amount of snow on roofs, especially if the snow is heavy and wet.

Blizzard of '78, Rhode Island



Cold-Related Illnesses

Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures makes it hard for your body to stay warm. It is important to know the symptoms of and treatment for cold-related illnesses.

Frostbite

- Frostbite is the skin's reaction to prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. Frostbite can cause permanent damage or lead to amputation.

Symptoms: White or grayish-yellow skin; skin feels unusually firm or waxy; numbness.

Treatment: If there are no signs of hypothermia and immediate medical attention is not available:

1. Go to a warm room as soon as possible.
2. Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes—this increases the damage.
3. Soak the affected area in warm (not hot) water. The temperature of the water should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body.
4. Warm the affected area using body heat. For example, the heat of an armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers.
5. Do not rub or massage the frostbitten area. This can cause more damage.
6. Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator to warm frostbitten areas. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.
7. Never give someone with hypothermia caffeinated or alcoholic beverages. Caffeine and alcohol can make cold-related illness happen faster.

Hypothermia:

- Hypothermia happens when the body's temperature is lower than 90 degrees.

Symptoms: Uncontrollable shivering; slow speech; memory lapses; frequent stumbling; drowsiness or exhaustion.

Treatment:

1. Seek immediate medical help.
2. Warm the person's body slowly. Warm the person's trunk (chest, shoulders, torso) first.
3. Arms and legs should be warmed last. When you try to warm limbs, cold blood can be forced to the heat and cause heart failure.
4. Put the person in dry clothing and wrap them in a blanket.
5. Never give someone with hypothermia caffeinated or alcoholic beverages. Caffeine and alcohol can make cold-related illness happen faster.