



Virginia Department of Emergency Management

News Release

JOINT INFORMATION CENTER
VIRGINIA EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER
Richmond, VA

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Take Precautions in Extreme Cold Weather

Richmond, Va. – As this most recent blast of arctic air moves across the Commonwealth, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) encourages residents to protect themselves against serious health problems that can result from prolonged exposure to the cold.

Lower Your Risk of Frostbite and Hypothermia

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Follow the advice below to avoid cold-weather health problems such as frostbite and hypothermia:

- Wear cold weather appropriate clothing such as gloves/mittens, hats, scarves and snow boots. Dress in several layers of loose-fitting clothing, and cover your face and mouth if possible.
- Be aware of the wind chill factor. Wind can cause body-heat loss.
- Stay dry, and if you become wet, remove wet clothing immediately.
- Limit your time outdoors.
- Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.
- If the heat in your home doesn't work properly, contact your local government to find a warming center near you.

Avoid Exertion

Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold. Otherwise, if you have to do heavy outdoor chores dress warmly and work slowly. Remember, your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so don't overdo it.

Reduce Risk of Cold Temperature Injuries

While cleaning up after the snowstorm, you are at risk for developing health problems from working in cold environments.

- Wear rubber boots.
- Ensure that clothing and boots have adequate insulation.
- Dress in layers to help keep in body heat.
- Take frequent breaks out of the snow/water.
- Change into dry clothing when possible.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide

- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is poisonous to breathe. During snow cleanup, operate all gasoline-powered devices such as generators outdoors and never bring them indoors. This will help to ensure your safety from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- **Beware of Electrical Hazards**
- If snow/water is present anywhere near electrical circuits and electrical equipment, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- Never touch electrical equipment if the ground is wet, unless you are certain that the power is off.
- Never touch a downed power line.
- When using gasoline and diesel generators to supply power to a building, switch the main breaker or fuse on the service panel to the off position before starting the generator.
- If clearing or other work must be performed near a downed power line, contact the utility company to discuss de-energizing and grounding or shielding of power lines.
- Extreme caution is necessary when moving ladders and other equipment near overhead power lines to avoid inadvertent contact.

Food Safety Precautions

- Perishable foods including meats, dairy products and eggs that have not been refrigerated for more than two hours should be discarded because they are no longer safe to consume.
- Foods that have been contaminated by flooding should also be discarded.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, pots and pans, dishes and inside refrigerators, etc.

Additional information on dealing with extreme cold is available from VDH at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/weather/ColdWeatherSafety.htm> and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>.

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