



**American
Red Cross**

of Greater Indianapolis



Winter Storm Safety

Winter storms are deceptively dangerous — deaths and injuries usually aren't related directly to the storm. The leading cause of death during winter storms is from automobile accidents and other transportation crashes, followed by exhaustion and heart attacks caused by overexertion.

Most people know the basic steps to staying warm, but the aftermath of a heavy snow or ice storm can bring dangers even if you're safe indoors or driving in your car. Preparing your home and vehicle for the inevitable storm and knowing how to stay warm in extreme conditions will help keep you and your family safe.

Prepare your home and vehicle for the cold

Prepare your home

- Weatherproof your home by caulking cracks, adding weather stripping and covering windows with plastic on the inside.
- If possible, add additional insulation, insulated doors and storm windows or thermal-pane windows.
- Let faucets drip when the temperature falls below freezing.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or newspapers and wrap the pipes in rags. Turn on all faucets and use controlled heat to melt the ice in the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold. A hair dryer works well, but use caution to prevent overheating.
- If you plan to use a fireplace or wood stove for emergency heating, have your chimney or flue inspected each year and install a smoke alarm and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated. (See **Fire Safety Tips** section for more tips.)

Prepare your vehicle

- Have your vehicles winterized.
- Assemble a disaster supplies kit for your vehicle. Include these items:
 - Blankets, rain gear and extra sets of dry clothing, mittens, socks and wool hats.
 - Non-clumping kitty litter, sand or gravel to generate traction if your vehicle gets stuck.
 - Extra newspapers for insulation and plastic bags for sanitation.
 - Several bottles of water.
 - High-energy foods such as peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts and snack bars. Ready-to-eat foods such as canned fruit or fruit cups, and a manual can opener, if necessary.
 - A small shovel, pocket knife and small tools.
 - A first-aid kit and essential medications.
 - Flashlight and extra batteries.
 - A candle in a metal can or other fireproof container. While candles generally aren't recommended in disaster situations, having one in your vehicle can be a source of heat and light if you're stranded. Don't forget the matches.
 - Cards, games and puzzles.
 - A brightly colored cloth (preferably red) to tie to the antenna, side mirror or roof rack if you need to signal for help.

Stay safe and warm at home

- Have extra blankets on hand.
- Use only portable heating equipment approved for indoor use.
- Do not use your stove or oven to heat rooms.
- Keep combustible materials — including clothing, furniture, drapes and carpeting — at least three feet away from the heat source. Never drape clothes over a space heater to dry.
- Don't overload electrical circuits.
- Always keep an eye on heating equipment. Never leave children alone in the room with a running space heater. Turn it off and unplug it if you're unable to monitor it safely and before you go to bed.

Ice-free: *Don't forget to keep your steps and walkways as free of ice as possible using a de-icing compound.*

Stay safe and warm outdoors

Prolonged exposure to cold can cause injury or serious illness such as hypothermia or frostbite. The likelihood of injury or illness depends on factors such as physical activity, clothing, wind, humidity, working and living conditions, and a person's state of health and age. Young children and older adults are the most susceptible to cold weather.

Remember, air temperature doesn't have to be below freezing for someone to experience hypothermia or frostbite. Wind chill, which combines the cooling effect of wind and cold temperatures on exposed skin, can create dangerously cold conditions even when the temperature isn't that low. As the wind increases, heat is carried away from a person's body at an accelerated rate, driving down the body temperature.

Follow these tips to stay safe and as warm as possible in cold weather:

- Stay indoors if you can. If you have to venture out, monitor the weather so you can avoid being outside during the coldest part of the day.
- Avoid being outdoors for extended periods.
- If you have to go out, dress appropriately.
 - **The layered look.** Several layers of lightweight clothing will keep you warmer than a single heavy coat. Layering also enables you to adjust to different activities and changing conditions.
 - **Hats on!** Most of your body heat is lost through your head, so wear a hat — preferably one that covers your ears.
 - **Find those mittens.** Mittens provide more warmth than gloves.
 - **Save your breath.** Cover your mouth to protect your lungs.
 - **These boots are made for walking.** Wear waterproof, insulated boots to keep your feet warm and dry and to maintain your footing on ice and snow.
- If you have to perform any outdoor activity, avoid overexertion.
 - **Easy does it.** Your body already is working hard just to stay warm, so take frequent breaks and stay hydrated.
 - **Take care.** If you must shovel snow, be extremely careful. It's physically strenuous work. Heart attacks from snow shoveling are a leading cause of death during winter.
 - **Warm up.** Once indoors, get out of wet clothes immediately and warm the core body temperature with a blanket or warm fluids like hot cider or soup.

Hypothermia and frostbite: learn the warning signs

Hypothermia

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold eventually will use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature.

Signs: Adults — shivering, dizziness, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion, fumbling hands, slurred speech. Infants — bright red skin, very low energy.

Treatment: If any of the above signs are present, take the person's temperature. If it's below 95 degrees, seek medical attention immediately. If medical care isn't available, begin warming the person as follows:

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- If the individual has on any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first — chest, neck, head, groin — using an electric blanket, if available. Or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
- Warm beverages help increase the body temperature, but avoid alcoholic beverages. Don't try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.

Frostbite

This is an injury to the body caused by freezing. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body.

Signs: White or grayish-yellow skin, or skin that feels unusually firm or waxy and numb.

Treatment: If you detect frostbite symptoms, seek medical care. If medical care isn't available:

- Get into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, don't walk on frostbitten feet or toes. Doing so increases the damage.
- Immerse the affected area in warm — not hot — water. The temperature should be comfortable to the touch for the unaffected parts of the body.
- If warm water isn't available, warm the affected area by using body heat.
- Don't rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it at all. This can cause more damage.
- Don't use a heating pad, heat lamp or the heat of a stove, fireplace or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be burned easily.

Winter storm terms: what they mean and how to respond

Winter storm watch: A winter storm is possible in your area. Listen to NOAA All Hazards Radio, local radio and TV stations for further updates. Be alert to changing weather conditions. Avoid unnecessary travel.

Winter storm warning: A significant winter storm is headed for your area. Stay indoors during the storm.

Blizzard warning: Strong winds, blinding wind-driven snow and dangerous wind chill are expected. Seek shelter immediately.

Winter travel

Traveling by vehicle can be dangerous in a winter storm or in extremely cold conditions.

If you have to venture out

- Make sure you have a full tank of gas.
- Let someone know your destination, your route and when you expect to arrive. If your vehicle gets stuck, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- Double-check that your winterized disaster supplies kit is in your vehicle.

If you get stuck

- Stay with your vehicle. Don't try to walk to safety.
- Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna, side mirror or roof rack for rescuers to see.
- Start the vehicle and use the heater for about 10 minutes every hour. Keep the exhaust pipe clear so fumes won't back up in the vehicle.
- Leave the overhead light on when the engine is running so you can be seen.
- As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to keep blood circulating and to stay warm.
- Keep one window — away from the blowing wind — slightly open to let in air.