

Cook County
Department of Public Health
Cook County Bureau of Health Services



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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COOK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISES CAUTION
DURING PERIODS OF EXTREME COLD

Snow, bitter cold and wind--just a few of the typical winter weather conditions in our region of the country that can contribute to health and safety issues. Vulnerable residents may be most adversely affected by the harsh temperatures that are expected over the next few weeks.

The Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) would like to make winter a little easier by offering some practical safety advice. When the weather is extremely cold, and especially if there are high winds, try to stay indoors.

"As a reminder, but most important, check on elderly or infirm neighbors and relatives often to ensure they are managing during a cold snap," said CCDPH chief operating officer, Stephen A. Martin, Jr., Ph.D., M.P.H.

The Wind Chill Index is the temperature your body feels when the air temperature is combined with the wind speed. It is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin caused by the effects of wind and cold. As the speed of the wind increases, it can carry heat away from your body much more quickly, causing skin temperature to drop. As a result, it's important to be properly dressed for lower temperatures.

Dressing for cold weather:

- Wear a warm hat. Most body heat is lost through the head.
- Protect your feet and hands. Waterproof boots and gloves will keep extremities warm and dry.

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- Cover as much of your face as possible while outside, breathe through a fluffy scarf to warm air before it enters 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.
- Be prepared for signs of frostbite. Skin that turns whitish, stiff or numb should be warmed gradually. Wrap the area in blankets, sweaters, coats, etc. Do not rub affected area or apply snow to frostbite. Seek medical attention immediately.

Shoveling snow:

- Cold weather strains the heart of even those in good shape. If you are strong enough to handle shoveling, make sure you rest often and pace yourself. Or if you are not in good shape, ask for help from a physically fit neighbor, friend or relative.
- Use a proper snow shovel and lift with your legs, not your back.

Auto safety:

- Keep your car in good condition by making sure you have enough gas, antifreeze, windshield wiper fluid and oil.
- Carry emergency supplies, including a flashlight and blanket.

In the home:

- Never use an oven as a heating device. Read all 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.
- Keep an emergency supply of bottled water and canned and other non perishable foods along with batteries and flashlights in

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case you are stranded at home. Make sure baby foods, diapers and medicines are included in your supply.

For your health:

- Drink caffeine-free, non-alcoholic beverages such as decaffeinated coffee, tea, hot chocolate and soup to stay warm and hydrated.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist about medications that could cause problems in cold weather.

Residents of suburban Cook County should check with their local municipalities and townships for warming center information.

For more information, contact CCDPH at 708-492-2000 or www.cookcountypublichealth.org.

Other resources include:

www.ready.gov/america/beinformed/winter.html

TDD for hearing/speech impaired: 708-492-2002.

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