

## Staying Safe During a Winter Storm or Blizzard

- Stay indoors and wear warm clothes. Layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing will keep you warmer than a bulky sweater. If you feel too warm, remove layers to avoid sweating; if you feel chilled, add layers.
- Listen to or watch local stations for updated weather or emergency information.
- Bring your companion animals inside before the storm begins.
- Eat regularly. Food provides the body with energy for producing its own heat.
- Keep the body replenished with fluids to prevent dehydration. Drink liquids such as warm broth or juice. Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine, a stimulant, accelerates the symptoms of hypothermia. Alcohol, such as brandy, is a depressant and hastens the effects of cold on the body. Alcohol also slows circulation and can make you less aware of the effects of cold. Both caffeine and alcohol can cause dehydration.
- Conserve fuel. Winter storms can last for several days, placing great demand on electric, gas, and other fuel distribution systems (fuel oil, propane, etc.). Lower the thermostat to 65° F (18° C) during the day and to 55° F (13° C) at night. Close off unused rooms, and stuff towels or rags in cracks under the doors. Cover the windows at night.
- Check on relatives, neighbors, and friends, particularly if they are elderly or if they live alone.

## Staying Safe Outside

- If you must go outside, protect yourself from winter storm hazards:
- Wear layered clothing, mittens or gloves, and a hat. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Mittens or gloves and a hat will prevent the loss of body heat.
- Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from severely cold air. Avoid taking deep breaths; minimize talking.

- Watch for signs of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses much of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly away from the body.
- Stretch before you go out. If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. This will reduce your chances of muscle injury.
- Avoid overexertion, such as shoveling heavy snow, pushing a vehicle, or walking in deep snow. The strain from the cold and the hard labor may cause injury. Sweating could lead to a chill and hypothermia.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy sidewalks. Slips and falls occur frequently in winter weather, resulting in painful and sometimes disabling injuries.
- If you must go out during a winter storm, use public transportation if possible.

### Driving in Winter Conditions

- Check your vehicle emergency supplies kit and replenish it if necessary.
- Bring enough of the following for each person:
  - Blankets or sleeping bags
  - Rain gear, extra sets of dry clothing, mittens, socks, and wool hats
  - Plastic bags for sanitation
  - Canned fruit, nuts, and high energy snacks
  - Warm broth in a thermos and several bottles of water
  - Keep a cell phone with you. Make sure the battery is charged.
  - Plan to travel during daylight and, if possible, take someone with you.
- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your vehicle gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.

- Before leaving, listen to weather reports for your area and the areas you will be passing through, or call the state highway patrol for the latest road conditions.
- Be on the lookout for sleet, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and dense fog, which can make driving very hazardous

### If You Become Stranded

- Stay in the vehicle and wait for help. Do not leave the vehicle to search for assistance unless help is visible within 100 yards (91 meters). You can quickly become disoriented and confused in blowing snow.
- Display a trouble sign to indicate you need help. Hang a brightly colored cloth (preferably red) on the radio antenna and raise the hood after snow stops falling.
- Run the engine occasionally to keep warm. Turn on the engine for about 10 minutes each hour (or five minutes every half hour). Running the engine for only short periods reduces the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and conserves fuel. Use the heater while the engine is running. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow, and slightly open a downwind window for ventilation.
- Leave the overhead light on when the engine is running so that you can be seen.
- Do light exercises to keep up circulation. Clap your hands and move your arms and legs occasionally. Try not to stay in one position for too long.
- If more than one person is in the vehicle, take turns sleeping. If you are not awakened periodically to increase body temperature and circulation, you develop hypothermia.
- Huddle together for warmth. Use newspapers, maps, and even the removable floor mats for added insulation. Layering items will help trap more body heat.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. Severe cold can cause numbness, making you unaware of possible danger.

- Drink fluids to avoid dehydration, which can make you more susceptible to the ill effects of cold and to heart attacks.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Shoveling snow or pushing a vehicle can make other medical conditions worse.

## Frostbite

Frostbite is the freezing of a specific body part, such as fingers, toes, the nose or earlobes.

Signs of frostbite:

- Lack of feeling in the affected area
- Skin that appears waxy, is cold to the touch, or is discolored (flushed, white or gray, yellow or blue)

What to do for frostbite:

1. Move to a warm place
2. Handle the area gently; never rub the affected area
3. Warm gently by soaking the affected area in warm water (100–105 degrees F) until it appears red and feels warm
4. Loosely bandage the area with dry, sterile dressings
5. If the fingers or toes are frostbitten, place dry, sterile gauze between them to keep them separated
6. Avoid breaking any blisters
7. Do not allow the affected area to refreeze
8. Seek professional medical care as soon as possible

## Hypothermia

Hypothermia is the cooling of the body caused by the failure of the body's warming system. The goals of first aid are to restore normal body temperature and to care for any conditions while waiting for EMS personnel.

Signs of hypothermia:

- Shivering
- Numbness or weakness
- Glassy stare
- Apathy or impaired judgment
- Loss of consciousness

What to do for hypothermia:

1. CALL 9-1-1 or the local emergency number
2. Gently move the person to a warm place
3. Monitor breathing and circulation
4. Give rescue breathing and CPR if needed
5. Remove any wet clothing and dry the person
6. Warm the person slowly by wrapping in blankets or by putting dry clothing on the person.
  - Hot water bottles and chemical hot packs may be used when first wrapped in a towel or blanket before applying. Do not warm the person too quickly, such as by immersing them in warm water.
  - Warm the core first (trunk, abdomen), not the extremities (hands, feet).