



# How to Prepare for a Winter Storm

Winter storms can cause power outages that last for days. They can make roads and walkways extremely dangerous and also negatively affect critical community services including public transportation, childcare, and health programs. Injuries and deaths may occur from exposure, dangerous road conditions, carbon monoxide poisoning, and other winter storm conditions. Be better prepared this winter, and learn more at [ready.gov/prepare](https://ready.gov/prepare).

## Now/Prepare

**Sign up** for local alerts and warnings.

**Create and test** emergency communication plan(s).

**Stock emergency supplies**, and install battery-powered or battery backed-up carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors.

**Winterize your home.** Visit [this page](#) to help you prepare.

**Review** your property insurance, and safeguard critical documents.

**Get trained** on specific needs your family may have. Also, consider joining your local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

**Identify** a place nearby where you can safely warm up should you lose heat in your home.

## During/Survive

**Stay indoors** and off the roads. If you must drive, keep emergency supplies in your car.

**Close off rooms** to consolidate and retain heat.

**Dress in layers**, and use blankets to stay warm.

**Bring pets into a warm place** and out of the storm or severe cold.

**Never use a generator**, camp stove, charcoal grill, or gasoline or propane heater indoors, as these items can start accidental fires, cause electric shock, and/or cause deadly carbon monoxide poisoning.

**Never heat** a home with a cooktop or oven.

**Limit your time outdoors**, and stay dry.

## After/Be Safe

**Only drive if necessary.** Remove snow and ice from your tailpipe before starting your car, and check regularly if idling. Clean all snow and ice from your car before driving.

**Dress in warm clothing**, stay dry, prevent prolonged exposure to cold and wind, and avoid overexertion clearing/shoveling snow. Overexertion can lead to a medical emergency.

**Monitor local news** and alerts for emergency information and instructions.

## During/Survive a Winter Storm

### STAY OFF THE ROAD

Federal Highway Administration reports indicate that the risk of vehicular accidents rises sharply in winter weather conditions. In an average year, there are more than half a million vehicle crashes when the roads are snowy, slushy, or icy, resulting in nearly 2,000 fatalities and 140,000 injuries.<sup>1</sup>

Driving is very dangerous during and immediately after a winter storm. Plan to stay off the road when authorities issue Advisories, Watches, and Warnings.

### ESSENTIAL TRAVEL ONLY

If driving is necessary, ensure you have emergency supplies of food, water, warm clothing, and a full tank of gas in case you are stuck in traffic or have an accident and have to wait several hours for assistance. If possible, travel during the day and do not travel alone. Stay on main roads and do not crowd the snowplows. Let someone know your destination, route, and expected arrival time.

If you become stranded in your car on a major highway, remain in your vehicle until help arrives. If you are stranded on a more remote road, use items around you to get attention for help.

### SNOW SHOVELING: OVER-EXERTION AND INJURY

Nearly 100 people die every year from heart attacks brought on by shoveling snow.<sup>2</sup> Use caution, take breaks, push the snow instead of lifting it when possible, and lift lighter loads. Consider clearing the sidewalks of your elderly neighbors or neighbors with disabilities.

## CAUTION: CARBON MONOXIDE KILLS



Each year, an average of 430 Americans die from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning,<sup>3</sup> and there are more than 20,000 visits to the emergency room with more than 4,000 hospitalizations.<sup>4</sup> Carbon monoxide-related deaths are highest during colder months. These deaths are likely due to increased use of gas-powered furnaces and alternative heating, cooking, and power sources used dangerously indoors during power outages. **NEVER** use a generator, grill, camp stove, or charcoal burning device inside or in any partially enclosed area; keep these devices at least 20 feet from doors, windows, and vents. If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh-air location outdoors or by an open window or door. From the fresh-air location call or text 9-1-1 for help, and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you.

<sup>1</sup> "How Do Weather Events Impact Roads?" U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, last modified February 1, 2017, accessed April 11, 2017, [www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/weather/q1\\_roadimpact.htm](http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/weather/q1_roadimpact.htm).

<sup>2</sup> "Snow Shoveling Safety," American Journal of Emergency Medicine, last updated January 2011, [www.nationwidechildrens.org/cirp-snow-shoveling](http://www.nationwidechildrens.org/cirp-snow-shoveling).

<sup>3</sup> United States, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Average Annual Number of Deaths and Death Rates from Unintentional, Non-Fire Related Carbon Monoxide Poisoning, by Sex and Age Group United States, 1999-2010," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 63, no. 3 (January 2014), 65.

<sup>4</sup> United States, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: Frequently Asked Questions," last modified December 30, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>.

# COLD WEATHER DANGERS

If you detect symptoms of frostbite, which is the freezing of the skin and body tissue beneath the skin, in either yourself or another person, seek medical care **IMMEDIATELY**. Additionally, hypothermia occurs when one's body temperature drops to dangerously low levels, so, before addressing symptoms of frostbite, first determine whether you or someone else is showing signs of hypothermia.

## UNDERSTANDING WIND CHILL

As the wind increases, your body is cooled at a faster rate, causing the skin temperature to drop. This is why it sometimes “feels” colder than the actual temperature. Wind chill is the temperature it “feels like” when you are outside. The NWS provides a Wind Chill Chart to show the difference between air temperature, and the perceived temperature, and the amount of time until frostbite occurs.

## SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA

- Uncontrollable shivering
- Memory loss, disorientation
- Incoherence, slurred speech
- Drowsiness
- Apparent exhaustion

## SIGNS OF FROSTBITE

Loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, earlobes, face, and the tip of the nose.

## WHAT TO DO

### If you detect symptoms of frostbite:

Cover exposed skin, but do not rub the affected area in an attempt to warm it up. Frostbite results in the formation of ice crystals in the

tissue, and rubbing could damage the tissue. Seek medical help immediately. For more information, visit the CDC's page on **frostbite** and **hypothermia**.

### If you detect symptoms of hypothermia:

- Get the victim to a warm location.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Warm the center of the body first by wrapping the person in blankets or putting on dry clothing.
- Give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the person is conscious.
- Take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°, seek medical attention immediately.

## WHAT TO WEAR

- **If you must go outside**, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent.
- **Wear mittens**, which are warmer than gloves.
- **Cover all of your body**. Wear a hat and a scarf, covering your mouth to protect your face and to help prevent loss of body heat.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



The following resources and websites can help you further prepare for, respond to, and recover from a winter storm.

**CDC Winter Prevention Guide:**

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>

**Winter Driving Tips:**

<https://one.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/tips/winter/index.html>

**Winter Storms...The Deceptive Killers:**

[www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/resources/Winter\\_Storms2008.pdf](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/winter/resources/Winter_Storms2008.pdf)

**Winter Weather Watches, Advisories, and Warnings :**

[www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)

**American Red Cross, *Disaster Cleanup & Repair for Your***

**Home:** <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/disaster-relief-and-recovery-services/disaster-cleanup.html>

### RELATED WEBSITES

**FEMA Mobile App:** [fema.gov/mobile-app](http://fema.gov/mobile-app)

**FEMA Winter Weather:** [www.ready.gov/winter-weather](http://www.ready.gov/winter-weather)

**American Red Cross Flood Safety:**

<http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/flood>

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):**

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):**

[www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov)

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/winter/index.asp>

**U.S. Fire Administration Winter Fire Safety (USFA):**

[www.usfa.fema.gov/winter](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/winter)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services**

**Administration Disaster Technical Assistance Center:**

[www.samhsa.gov/dtac](http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac)

**Para obtener información y recursos en español visite**

<https://community.fema.gov/?lang=es>

# WINTER STORM PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

The right time to prepare for a winter storm is now. This checklist will help get you started. Make sure to include your entire family in the preparation, and discuss your emergency plan with them. Then, post this checklist in an easily accessible location so it is always close by. Every family is different, so when you fill this out, be sure to consider your family's specific needs.

## BEFORE A WINTER STORM

Stock your emergency kit for sheltering with:

## EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION

- Important contact information for family, school, work, doctors, etc., including phone numbers and email addresses
- Cellular phone, extra battery, and chargers for electrical equipment
- AM/FM radio/NOAA weather radio (extra batteries)
- \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDICAL NEEDS

- Medications, plans for refrigeration for at least one week, and copies of prescriptions
- Extra eyeglasses/contact lens
- Medical equipment/assistive technology and backup batteries
- First aid kit
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## CRITICAL DOCUMENTS

- Photo ID (e.g., driver's license, passport)
- Cash and credit cards
- Personal records (e.g., birth certificates, marriage certificates)
- Medical records
- Financial information (e.g., bank account or credit card information)
- Property records (e.g., insurance policies, deed, or lease)

- Waterproof, portable container for important documents
- \_\_\_\_\_

## TOOLS & SAFETY ITEMS

- Flashlight
- Multi-tool
- Matches or lighter in waterproof container
- Local Map
- Fire Extinguisher
- Bag of sand or cat litter
- Shovel
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## FOOD/SUPPLIES

- At least a three-day supply of non-perishable food; if possible, stock for a week or more for sheltering
- At least a three-day supply of water (1 gal per person per day), if possible stock for a week or more for sheltering
- Infant formula and diapers
- Pet food, supplies, and extra water
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## HYGIENE & SANITATION

- Soap/disinfectant/sanitizer
- Paper towels/moist towelettes
- Toilet paper
- Bleach
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- \_\_\_\_\_

## PROTECTIVE GEAR & CLOTHING

- Extra warm clothes
- Sturdy shoes
- Blankets or sleeping bags (sleeping bags should be labeled for low temperatures)
- Snow gear including gloves
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## CAR EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT

- Cellular phone charger
- First aid kit
- Jumper cables
- Flares
- Whistle
- Water, snacks
- Full tank of gas
- Flashlight
- Tow rope
- Boots, mittens, warm clothes
- Blanket
- Shovel
- Ice scraper, snow brush
- Snow traction mats and bags of sand or cat litter (cat litter helps with the tire traction)
- Tire chains or snow tires
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## COMFORT & PRICELESS ITEMS

- Items like: books, puzzles, favorite stuffed toy, photo albums, valuables
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_