Extreme cold and winter storms

Cold snaps and winter storms bring snow, ice and freezing temperatures that can cut power, block roads and cause hypothermia, frostbite or carbon monoxide poisoning. This page helps families prepare the home and car, keep warm safely, and respond to cold injuries.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Drinking water, about 3.8 litres (1 gallon) per person per day
- [ ] At least two weeks of food and supplies at home
- [ ] One month of medicines plus a list of medicines and doses
- [ ] Hats, mittens and blankets for everyone
- [ ] Battery powered radio with spare batteries
- [ ] Torch with spare batteries
- [ ] Battery operated carbon monoxide detector
- [ ] Snow shovel and ice melt for paths
- [ ] Phone, power bank and extra batteries
- [ ] Car: blankets or sleeping bag, warm clothes and boots
- [ ] Car: ice scraper, jumper cables and sand or cat litter for grip

BEFORE

- Sign up for official weather alerts. A watch means get ready, a warning means act now.
- Seal draughts with insulation, caulk and weather stripping, and insulate water pipes along outside walls.
- Make a household plan that covers older relatives, children, pets and anyone with health needs.
- Have chimneys and furnaces checked yearly, and fit battery carbon monoxide detectors near fuel-burning heaters.
- Store at least two weeks of food, medicine and water, about 3.8 litres (1 gallon) per person daily.
- Service the car before winter: antifreeze, tyres, battery and brakes. Keep the fuel tank nearly full.

DURING

- Stay indoors and avoid travel. If you must drive, go in daylight and tell someone your route.
- Keep anything that can burn at least 1 metre (3 feet) from space heaters and fireplaces.
- Never heat your home with a gas oven or cooking stove.
- Run generators only outdoors, at least 6 metres (20 feet) from doors, windows and vents. Never grill indoors.
- If anyone feels dizzy, sick or weak, get them into fresh air immediately. Carbon monoxide can kill.
- Use torches and battery lights instead of candles during a power cut.
- If stranded, stay in the car unless help is visible within about 90 metres (100 yards).
- Run the engine about 10 minutes each hour, with the exhaust clear of snow and a downwind window open slightly.

AFTER

- Shivering, confusion, slurred speech or drowsiness can mean hypothermia. Treat it as an emergency and get medical help.
- While waiting, move the person somewhere warm, remove wet clothes and wrap them in blankets, head covered.
- Do not use hot baths, hot water bottles or heat lamps, rub their limbs or give alcohol.
- For frostbite, remove rings and wet gloves, then soak the area in warm, not hot, water.

MY NOTES

Sources: American Red Cross, Winter Storm Safety (https://redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/winter-storm.html); CDC, Preparing for a Winter Storm (https://www.cdc.gov/winter-weather/safety/index.html); CDC, Preventing Hypothermia (https://www.cdc.gov/winter-weather/prevention/index.html); CDC, Preventing Frostbite (https://cdc.gov/winter-weather/prevention/preventing-frostbite.html); NHS, Hypothermia (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Hypothermia/); NHS, Frostbite (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/frostbite/); CDC, Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Poisoning (https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/psa-toolkit/avoiding-carbon-monoxide-poisoning.html); Government of Canada (Get Prepared), Winter storms (https://www.canada.ca/en/services/policing/emergencies/preparedness/get-prepared/hazards-emergencies/winter-storms.html)
General guidance in our own words. Always follow your local authorities.