



## FACT SHEET

### Winter Storms

#### Winter storms can be deadly.

- Extreme cold can cause hypothermia (an extreme lowering of the body's temperature) and death.
- Fireplaces, emergency heaters, and candles can cause household fires.
- Toxic fumes, such as carbon monoxide, from heaters can cause asphyxiation (unconsciousness or death from a lack of oxygen).
- Hazardous road conditions can cause car accidents.

**Prepare for a winter storm before it hits.** This is the best way to keep your family and yourself safe. Plan ahead: prepare your house and car; stock up on emergency supplies.

#### Plan Ahead and Prepare for Winter

##### House checklist

- Insulate walls and attic.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
- Insulate any water lines that run along outer walls (water will be less likely to freeze).
- Service snow-removal equipment.
- Have chimney and flue inspected.
- Install easy-to-read outdoor thermometer.

##### Car checklist

**Keep your car fueled and in good working order.** Check:

- Antifreeze
- Windshield wiper fluid (wintertime mixture)
- Heater
- Brakes
- Ignition
- Emergency flashers
- Exhaust
- Tires (air pressure and wear)
- Fuel
- Oil
- Brake fluid
- Defroster
- Battery
- Radiator

#### Before a Winter Storm Hits

**Stock up on emergency supplies for communication, food, safety, heating, and car in case a storm hits.** (See below.)

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### **Communication Supplies**

**Make sure you have at least one of the following in case there is a power failure:**

- Battery-powered radio (for listening to local emergency instructions). Have extra batteries.  
or
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio receiver (for listening to National Weather Service broadcasts). More information on NOAA weather radio receivers is available at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr>.

**Find out how your community warns the public about severe weather:**

- Siren
- Radio
- TV

**Listen to emergency broadcasts. Know what winter storm warning terms mean:**

- Winter weather advisory (Expect winter weather conditions to cause inconvenience and hazards.)
- Frost/freeze warning (Expect below-freezing temperatures.)
- Winter storm watch (Be alert. A storm is likely.)
- Winter storm warning (Take action. The storm is in or entering the area.)
- Blizzard warning (Seek refuge immediately! Snow and strong winds, near-zero visibility, deep snow drifts, and life-threatening wind chill.)

### **Food and Safety Supplies**

**Have a week's worth of food and safety supplies.** If you live far from other people, have more supplies on hand.

- Drinking water
- Canned/no-cook food (bread, crackers, dried fruits)
- Non-electric can opener
- Baby food and formula (if baby in the household)
- Prescription drugs and other medicine
- First-aid kit
- Rock-salt to melt ice on walkways
- Supply of cat litter or bag of sand to add traction on walkways
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery-powered lamps or lanterns  
(To prevent the risk of fire, avoid using candles.)

**Keep a water supply.** Extreme cold can cause water pipes in your home to freeze and sometimes break.

- Leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.
- Keep the indoor temperature warm.
- Allow more heated air near pipes. Open kitchen cabinet doors under the kitchen sink.
- If your pipes do freeze, do not thaw them with a torch. Thaw the pipes slowly with warm air from an electric hair dryer.
- If you cannot thaw your pipes, or if the pipes have broken open, use bottled water or get water from a neighbor's home.
- Have bottled water on hand.
- In an emergency—if no other water is available—snow can be melted for water. Bringing water to a rolling boil for one minute will kill most germs but won't get rid of chemicals sometimes found in snow.

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### *Heating Supplies*

**Have at least one of the following heat sources in case the power goes out:**

- Fireplace with plenty of dry firewood or gas log fireplace
- Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters (Check with your local fire department to make sure that kerosene heaters are legal in your area.)

**Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.** Use electric space heaters with

- automatic shut-off switches and
- nonglowing elements.

**Keep heat sources at least 3 feet away from furniture and drapes. Never leave children unattended near a space heater.** Have the following safety equipment:

- Chemical fire extinguisher
- Smoke alarm in working order (Check once a month and change batteries once a year.)
- Carbon monoxide detector

**Never use an electric generator indoors, inside the garage, or near the air intake of your home because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning:**

- Do not use the generator or appliances if they are wet.
- Do not store gasoline indoors where the fumes could ignite.
- Use individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated cords to plug in other appliances.

### *Cooking and Lighting Supplies*

**Never use charcoal grills or portable gas camp stove indoors—the fumes are deadly.**

**Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns.**

- Avoid using candles.
- Never leave lit candles alone.

### *Car and Emergency Supplies*

**Prepare your car with emergency supplies.** Include:

- Cell phone; portable charger and extra batteries
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper
- Battery-powered radio (and extra batteries)
- Flashlight (and extra batteries)
- Water
- Snack food
- Extra hats, coats, mittens
- Blankets
- Chains or rope
- Tire chains
- Canned compressed air with sealant (emergency tire repair)
- Road salt and sand
- Booster cables
- Emergency flares
- Bright colored flag; help signs

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- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- Road maps
- Compass
- Waterproof matches and a can (to melt snow for water)
- Paper towels

## During a Winter Storm

### ***Indoor Safety***

- If possible, stay indoors and dress warmly.
- Conserve fuel. Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and 55 degrees Fahrenheit at night.
- Close off unused rooms.
- Seal drafts from doors and windows.

### **Outdoor Safety**

**Babies and the elderly are more at risk from the cold and should be kept warm.**

- Dress warmly. Wear loose-fitting, layered clothes. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water-repellent.
- Wear mittens rather than gloves—mittens are warmer.
- If you shovel snow, do stretching exercises to warm up. Take breaks often.
- Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from extremely cold air.
- Avoid working too hard (strains your heart).
- Drink water and other fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Watch for signs of frostbite: Feeling of “pins and needles” followed by numbness (no feeling). Skin may freeze hard and look white. When thawed out, skin is red and painful. Very bad frostbite may cause blisters or gangrene (black, dead tissue).
- Watch for signs of hypothermia (uncontrolled shivering, slow speech, memory loss, stumbling, sleepiness, extreme tiredness).
- If you think you have frostbite or hypothermia, don’t eat or drink anything containing caffeine or alcohol—they can worsen your symptoms.
- Drink warm liquids that do not contain caffeine or alcohol. (alcoholic drinks cause your body to lose heat more quickly).
- Do not eat snow (lowers your body temperature).

### ***In Your Car***

**Travel with caution:**

- Listen for travel warnings.
- Avoid icy roads if possible.
- Use tire chains.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to arrive. Ask them to notify help if you are late.
- Check and restock emergency supplies in your car before you leave.
- Never pour water on your windshield to remove ice or snow; the windshield may shatter.

**If you are trapped in your car in a winter storm:**

- Stay in the car.
- Do not leave the car to look for help unless help is visible within 100 yards.

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- Display a “call for help” sign.
- Raise the car hood or hang a brightly colored cloth on the antenna to signal for help.
- To keep warm, turn on the car’s engine for about 10 minutes each hour.
- Run the heater only when the car is running. (Avoid running the car battery down.)
- Turn on car lights only when the car is running. (Avoid running the car battery down.)
- Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow. (Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.)
- Open a window slightly for fresh air.
- Do light exercise to stay warm.
- If you’re alone, stay awake as much as possible.
- If more than one person is in the car, take turns sleeping.
- For warmth, huddle close together.
- Wrap your body and head with extra clothes, blankets, newspapers, maps, or removable car mats.
- Do not eat snow (lowers your body temperature). If no other water is available, snow can be melted for water using a can and a lit match. (Please note: Water must come to a rolling boil for one minute to kill most germs, but boiling water won’t get rid of chemicals sometimes found in snow.)

For more information, visit [www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov), or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY).