



Are You Ready?

# WINTER STORMS

*A Fact Sheet for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*



*A major winter storm can be deadly. Snow, white-outs and ice can make for dangerous road and living conditions. Preparing for cold weather conditions and responding to them successfully can reduce the dangers caused by winter storms.*

## **Plan ahead.**

### ***Winterize your home.***

- Insulate walls and attic.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside.
- Prepare snow removal equipment and have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways and kitty litter to generate temporary footing.

### ***Check your heating sources.***

Make sure you have sufficient heating fuel; regular fuel sources may be cut off. Have alternative heating equipment available, such as a fireplace or kerosene heaters.

- Stock your fireplace with an ample supply of wood.
- Have a small, well-vented, wood, coal or camp stove with fuel.
- Have portable space heaters or kerosene heaters. Check with your local fire department about using kerosene heaters in your community. Use only the correct fuel for your unit and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Refuel outdoors only, and only when cool. Keep your kerosene heater at least three feet away from furniture and other flammable objects.
- Install and check visual smoke detectors.

### ***Keep pipes from freezing.***

- Wrap pipes in insulation or layers of old newspapers. Cover the newspapers with plastic to keep out moisture.
- Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing.
- Know how to shut off water valves.

### **Stock up on supplies, such as:**

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Cell phone with text message feature or two-way pager and charger to use in your automobile

- Portable TTY with extra batteries
- Batteries and back-up hearing assistive technology
- Portable battery-operated television with extra batteries and charger to use in your automobile
- NOAA radios with text alerts and visual and/or tactile alerts, or AM/FM portable radio if you can hear it with a neckloop or headset
- Extra contact lenses or eyeglasses
- Paper and pens
- First aid kit
- Food and water (for up to 72 hours)
- Non-electric can opener
- Cash and credit cards
- Work or hiking shoes/boots to protect your feet
- Generator for back-up electricity

## **Develop an emergency communication plan.**

In case your household members are separated from one another during a winter storm, have a back-up plan where you can meet each other. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be a contact person. After the storm, contact that person by pager, TTY or videophone. If you don't have a working pager, TTY or videophone, ask a hearing person with a cell phone to call for you. Be sure each household member knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person. Also be sure to write down all videophone numbers and IP addresses on a piece of paper.

## **If you are indoors:**

- Stay indoors and dress warmly. Conserve fuel.
- Lower the thermostat to 65 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night. Close off unused rooms.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags.
- Fully open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).

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- Watch television to get the latest information.
- If you see broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.
- Check for sewage and water lines damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid the water from the tap. You may obtain safe water by melting ice cubes or using bottled water.
- Monitor the Internet for weather updates.

## If you are outdoors:

- Dress warmly. Wear loose-fitting, layered, light-weight clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellant. Mittens are warmer than gloves because fingers generate warmth when they touch each other.
- Stretch before you go out. If you go out to shovel snow, do a few stretching exercises to warm up your body. Also take many breaks.
- Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of signs of dehydration.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. Keep dry.

## Frostbite and Hypothermia

*Frostbite* is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite. *Hypothermia* is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the affected person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put the person in dry clothing and wrap his/her entire body in a blanket.

## Winter Storm Watches and Warnings

- A *winter storm watch* indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area.
- A *winter storm warning* indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.
- A *blizzard warning* means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

*Information adapted from materials by the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)).*



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