



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Contact: Amie M. Downs
412-350-3711 (office)
412-327-3700 (cell)
amie.downs@alleghenycounty.us

County Prepares for Extreme Winter Weather, Offers Tips and Information

PITTSBURGH – The [National Weather Service Pittsburgh](#) has forecast snow and continued low temperatures throughout the weekend and New Year's Day holiday. Based on the predicted weather, we offer the following tips and information on how the county is preparing for the weather, and how residents can prepare for the extreme cold, deal with it once here, and what can be done afterward.

The [Department of Public Works](#) will have trucks out to maintain county roads. As temperatures are below 20 degrees, crews will use liquid calcium with the salt on the roads. Supervisors are monitoring the weather and conditions, and will make adjustments to schedules and routes as appropriate.

Winter driving can be hazardous. According to the National Weather Center, 70% of snow and ice-related injuries occur in automobiles. Drivers should expect to encounter slick roads and there may be reduced visibility due to blowing snow. They should also be aware of the possibility of black ice, which is difficult to see and makes roads very slippery, particularly on bridges and overpasses. Drivers are encouraged to drive according to the conditions, leaving extra space between their vehicle and the ones in front of them, and to give salt trucks plenty of room to navigate and treat the roads.

Prepare your vehicle for winter, like you do your home. Check or have checked antifreeze, brakes, heater and defroster, tires and windshield wipers. Keep your gas tank at least half full. Keep an extra emergency kit specifically created for your car in the vehicle. Consider adding a portable cell phone charger, ice scraper, extra blanket, sand for traction, and jumper cables.

If stranded/stuck on a road, make smart decisions about whether to stay or go. You should stay to avoid exposure and/or when rescue is likely. You should stay if a safe location is neither nearby or visible. Stay if you do not have appropriate clothing to go outside, or if you do not have the ability to call for help.

Although temperatures are expected to remain low, with wind chills making the temperatures feel even lower, the [Department of Emergency Services](#) does not currently have plans to open warming centers. Those decisions are typically made by individual municipalities at the discretion of the local emergency management coordinator. In the event that there are power outages or other circumstances that impact a number of residents, that information will be provided to the media and share on the county's social media channels.

The department offers the following tips to prepare for the extreme cold:

- Make certain that you have an [emergency kit](#) which includes enough food, water, medicine and other supplies to last for at least 72 hours. Basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment and telephones may also be affected. Your supplies kit should contain items to help you manage during such outages. Consider sufficient heating fuel if you have a secondary source of heat, and also ensure that you have adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone in your household knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk as more people turn to alternate heating sources. The primary hazards to avoid when using alternate sources for electricity, heating or cooking are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock and fire.

- Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Only appliances designed for safe indoor use should be used indoors. Locate unit away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors. At no time should a cooking stove or oven be used for heat. This can be a fire hazard as well as a source of deadly carbon monoxide.
- Alternative heat sources such as radian electric heaters and natural gas logs, wood burning stoves, fireplaces or heaters should be in good working order and maintained to manufacturers recommendations. Keep the immediate area around these devices clear of anything flammable or any items that could block or knock over the appliance. Do not overload electrical outlets or circuits. Most electrical heating devices draw high electrical current could cause heating or failure of electrical wiring or circuits if the circuit is not properly sized for the demand.
- Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector. If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door. Call for help from the fresh air location and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you. Don't have a carbon monoxide alarm? The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, call for help from a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door and remain there until emergency personnel arrives.
- Maintain proper operating smoke detectors for at least every floor of your home and every bedroom. Also consider the addition of a natural gas detector to your home to alert you to unburned or leaking natural gas in the home.
- If your pipes freeze, allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather. Running water, even at a trickle, will prevent freezing. As a precaution, you should also know how to shut off water valves in the event that a pipe breaks. Avoid using open flame torches or burners to thaw pipes. Many home fires have originated from unsafe pipe thawing techniques. Leave these extreme tasks to professional plumbers.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water and plenty of food.

Dealing with the Extreme Cold

Stay indoors as much as possible. 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. Wear a hat as you can lose as much as 50 percent of your body's heat through the head. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs. Bundling up in layers and staying dry is one of the best things you can do to protect yourself from the cold.

If you are outdoors, watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia, the dangerous and sometimes fatal lowering of body temperatures. Frostbite includes loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion.

The wind chill index, which takes into account the combined effect of wind speed and air temperature, can be used to indicate the risk of frostbite to exposed skin. Frostbite can occur within 30 minutes at a wind chill temperature of -19, within ten minutes at -33 and within five minutes at -48. The [Allegheny County Health Department](#), recommends the following precautions:

- Cover as much skin as possible to guard against frostbite. The nose, cheeks, ears, fingers and toes are most vulnerable. Wind and precipitation raise the risk of frostbite.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages because they cause the body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages, broth or soup to maintain body temperature.

- To treat frostbite, cover the frozen area to protect it from further injury and provide extra clothing or blankets. Bring the victim indoors, if possible, and provide something warm and non-alcoholic to drink. Rewarm the frozen area by immersing it in warm, *not hot*, water. Call for emergency medical assistance.

Hypothermia, occurs when someone's body temperature drops below 95 degrees, It can occur indoors. If you can't maintain a house temperature of 70 degrees, dress warmly and use blankets and hats to keep warm, especially for infants, the elderly and the chronically ill.

If someone is suffering from hypothermia, bring the victim into a warm room. Remove wet or frozen clothing. Place the victim in warm blankets or a tub of warm, *not hot*, water. If the victim is conscious, give him non-alcoholic hot liquids. Call for emergency medical assistance.

The [Department of Human Services](#) encourages all county residents to check on older neighbors to make sure they are safe during periods of severe weather and offers the following tips and guidelines:

- Make sure seniors have a list of emergency telephone numbers that includes neighbors and family members who can help, if needed.
- Check to see if the furnace is working if the home feels cold. Become alert to dangerous methods of heating a room, such as open flames or ovens.
- Ensure that walkways and steps leading to their homes are cleared and that there is food and water in the house.
- Go back later or the next day, if at all possible, to make sure everything is still alright. Remove your coat and stay at least 15 minutes to determine if the home is warm enough. This is also a great chance to share a cup of coffee (decaffeinated, of course), verify the pipes are not frozen, and check on pets.
- Be particularly mindful of older neighbors during a power outage. Lack of electrical power not only presents dangers associated with lack of heat, but also risks associated with non-functioning vital medical equipment, such as oxygen systems, emergency lighting, stair glides and medication timers. If you cannot contact someone you believe is in the house, contact your local police or emergency services.

When weather circumstances dictate, the [Area Agency on Aging](#) and its contracted providers contact frail, isolated and high-risk consumers who are registered for care management. Care managers visit those at highest risk and ensure each home is well-heated and has enough food, water and medication to last for several days. Care managers also respond to emergency needs as they arise.

The Area Agency on Aging has already provided about 1,200 "Snowy Weather Boxes" to at-risk older adults who are registered with the agency. The boxes include toilet paper, non-skid slipper socks, hand sanitizer, flashlight and batteries, peanut butter, crackers, tuna, fruit juice, bottled water, and other shelf-stable meals and drinks.

Information about programs and services for older adults is available calling the SeniorLine at 412-350-5460 (TDD/TTY 412-350-2727), sending an email to SeniorLine@AlleghenyCounty.us or by visiting the DHS Older Adults website at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/olderadults.aspx.

Additionally, the Winter Shelter for men, located at Smithfield United Church of Christ, 620 Smithfield Street, will be open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. to provide temporary, overnight accommodations, professional social services, medical care, and protection from frigid temperatures. The Winter Shelter is available every night through March 15, 2018. In addition, between March 16 and March 31, 2018, the Winter Shelter will open on nights of extreme weather, 25°F or below, when the wind chill factor is below 15°F, or when there is a 50 percent or greater chance of freezing precipitation. Women in need of shelter should call the Winter Shelter at 412-498-0908.

[After Extreme Cold](#)

If your home loses power or heat during periods of extreme cold, continue to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in several layers. Stay indoors, if possible. Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.

If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they are most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was mostly likely to penetrate).

Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Services and other resources. Be alert to changing weather conditions.

For More Information

In an emergency, call 9-1-1 immediately from any wired or wireless phone. An emergency is any situation which requires immediate assistance from the police, fire department or medical professionals. If you're not sure whether the situation is a true emergency, call 9-1-1 and the telecommunications officer will determine whether you need emergency help.

While extreme cold weather cannot be controlled, we can all be prepared by taking action in advance to protect ourselves and our families. Be informed. Make a plan. Build a kit. Get involved. Those are the four fundamental steps to being prepared if an emergency occurs. For more information, visit www.ready.gov.

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Office of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald
101 Courthouse | 436 Grant Street | Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Phone: 412-350-6500 | Fax: 412-350-6512
www.allegHENYcounty.us

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