

NEWS RELEASE

COUNTY OF ONONDAGA



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***** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *****

Community Urged to Take Precautions During Severe Cold

Due to the Winter Weather Advisory that has been issued, Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta recommends that Onondaga County residents take precautions against cold-related injuries and carbon monoxide poisoning. Dr. Gupta explained, "With the extreme cold in the forecast, people, especially the elderly and young children, need to take measures to protect themselves from hypothermia and frostbite, and make sure their homes are safely heated." Dr. Gupta reminds residents to check on other family members and neighbors during extremely cold weather. Homeless individuals are encouraged to seek shelter if possible. If you have pets, bring them inside or provide adequate, warm shelter.

Hypothermia, or lowered body temperature, can occur after prolonged exposure to a cold environment. Watch out for the signs and symptoms of hypothermia:

- Shivering
- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Drowsiness
- Exhaustion
- Slurred speech
- Glassy stare
- Slow, irregular pulse
- Numbness
- Decreased level of consciousness

If you recognize the above signs and symptoms in yourself or others, seek medical help immediately. Remove all wet/cold clothing and place the individual in dry blankets/clothing. If conscious, provide a warm beverage.

Frostbite is an injury to exposed body parts such as the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It can permanently damage body parts if not treated quickly. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of frostbite:

- Any discoloration of the skin such as flushed, white, yellow, or blue depending on the length of exposure
- Waxy appearance of skin
- Lack of feeling or numbness

If you experience any of these signs and symptoms:

- Handle the frostbitten area gently
- Do not rub the area
- Expose the affected area to a source of warmth
- Seek medical attention

General Safety Tips during Cold Weather:

- Stay indoors, if possible
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages, which cause the body to lose heat more rapidly
- Do not ignore shivering—it is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to quickly return indoors

When going outdoors, adults and children should wear:

- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing
- A wind and water-resistant coat
- A scarf to cover their face and mouth, hat, and gloves or mittens
- Insulated waterproof boots

It is also important to stay safe when heating your home, especially during a power outage. Take precautions to avoid exposure to carbon monoxide any time a fossil fuel such as natural gas, oil, or coal is burned. Make sure that both smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors are in working order. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas and is hard to detect. Common symptoms of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, confusion, and can lead to death. Do not ignore these symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them. Get medical help right away.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented by taking the following precautions:

- Install a carbon monoxide detector which is battery powered or has a battery back-up and is certified by Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Have gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ranges and ovens, gas dryers, gas or kerosene space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves inspected by a trained professional at the beginning of every heating season. Be sure that the flues and chimneys are in good working condition.
- Choose appliances that vent their fumes to the outside whenever possible.
- Read and follow all the instructions that come with any fuel-burning device.
- Do not idle the car in a garage, even if the garage door to the outside is open.
- Do not use a gas oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
- Do not use a charcoal grill indoors, even in a fireplace.
- Do not sleep in any room with an unvented gas or kerosene space heater.
- Do not use any gas-powered engines (mowers, weed trimmers, snow blower, chain saws, small engines, or generators) in enclosed spaces.

For more information on how to reduce your risks from carbon monoxide contact the Upstate New York Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or visit www.cdc.gov/co/facts.htm. For more information about hypothermia, frostbite, and other cold weather conditions, visit www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.html.

