

Winter Weather Health & Safety Tips



Tips for Staying Warm

Exposure to cold can cause life-threatening health conditions, such as frostbite and hypothermia. Take steps to keep warm.

- Wear a hat, hood, or scarf, as most heat is lost through the head.
- Wear layers, as they provide better insulation and warmth.
- Keep fingertips, earlobes, and noses covered if you go outside.
- Keep clothing dry; if a layer becomes wet, remove it.

Recognize the signs and symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite:

- **Hypothermia** is a life-threatening condition where the body temperature is abnormally low. Symptoms may include shivering, slurred speech, sluggishness, drowsiness, unusual behavior, confusion, dizziness, and shallow breathing. Some people, such as infants, seniors, and those with chronic diseases and substance abuse problems can get sick quicker.
- **Frostbite** is a serious injury to a body part frozen from exposure to the cold. It most often affects extremities like fingers and toes or exposed areas such as ears or parts of the face. Redness and pain may be the first warning of frostbite. Other symptoms include numbness or skin that appears pale, firm, or waxy.
- If you suspect a person is suffering from frostbite or hypothermia, call **911** to get medical help. Help the person get warm by getting them to a warm place, removing any damp clothing, and covering them with warm blankets.

How to Help Others

- Infants, seniors, and people with paralysis or neuropathy are at increased risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Check on friends, relatives, and neighbors who may need assistance to ensure they are adequately protected from the cold.
- If you identify someone on the street you believe needs assistance, call **311** and ask for the Department of Homeless Services' Mobile Outreach Response Team.

Safe Home Heating Tips

Improper use of portable heating equipment can lead to fire or dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. Ensure you are heating your home safely. NEVER use gas stoves or portable gas heaters indoors to heat your home, as those can lead to fire or dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

Fire Safety

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm in every room. Check and change batteries often.
- Use only portable heating equipment that is approved for indoor use.
- Keep combustible materials, including furniture, drapes, and carpeting at least three feet away from the heat source. NEVER drape clothes over a space heater to dry.
- Always keep an eye on heating equipment. Never leave children alone in the room where a space heater is running. Turn it off when you are unable to closely monitor it.
- Be careful not to overload electrical circuits.

Carbon Monoxide Safety

- Install a carbon monoxide alarm in your home and check it regularly to make sure the battery is working. NYC law requires owners to provide and install at least one approved carbon monoxide alarm within 15 feet of the primary entrance to each sleeping room. [Learn more about NYC's carbon monoxide detector law](#)
- Make sure your heating system is kept clean and properly vented; have worn or defective parts replaced.
- Have your fireplace, chimney, and flue cleaned every year to remove soot deposits, leaves, etc.

- Never heat your home with a gas stove or oven, charcoal barbecue grill, or kerosene, propane, or oil-burning heaters, as they can lead to fires and exposure to carbon monoxide.
- **The most common symptom of carbon monoxide poisoning is headache.** However, symptoms may also include dizziness, chest pain, nausea, and vomiting. In severe cases, people can become increasingly irritable, agitated and confused, eventually becoming lethargic and lapsing into unconsciousness.
- If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, call **911**, and get the victim to fresh air immediately, and open windows.
[Learn more about carbon monoxide](#)

For more information on how to properly and safely heat your home, visit the [NYC Fire Department](#).

What to Do If You Lose Heat

If you don't have adequate heat or hot water, first speak with your building owner, manager, or superintendent. If the problem is not corrected, call **311**. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) will attempt to contact your building's owner to get heat or hot water service restored.

If service is not restored, HPD will send an inspector to verify the complaint and issue a violation. If your landlord does not live up to his or her legal obligation, HPD will call in emergency contractors to get your heat and hot water working again.

For more information about loss of heat or hot water, refer to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's [webpage on tenants' rights](#).

If you lose heat, take measures to trap existing warm air, and safely stay warm until heat returns:

- Insulate your home as much as possible. Hang blankets over windows and doorways and stay in a well-insulated room while power is out.
- Dress warmly. Wear hats, scarves, gloves, and layered clothing.
- If you have a working fireplace, use it for heat and light, but be sure to keep the damper open for ventilation.
- Open your faucets to a steady drip so pipes do not freeze.
- Eat. Food provides your body with needed energy to produce its own heat and drinking helps your body avoid dehydration.

- If the cold persists and your heat is not restored, call family, neighbors, or friends to see if you can stay with them.

Resources

- If you are in immediate danger, **call 911**.
- To report damage to your home or business, or for non-emergency service requests, **call 311** or contact [311 online](#).
- Sign up for [Notify NYC](#) for emergency information via text, tweet, e-mail, and phone.
- Follow NYC Emergency Management on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Learn more about winter weather and other hazards on NYC Emergency Management's website: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/em/ready/winter-weather-prep.page>