



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFERS COLD WEATHER SAFETY TIPS

Homeless Services Code Blue In Effect - Outreach Efforts Double

With temperatures expected to be at or below 30 degrees over the next few days, the New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) encourages New Yorkers to take steps to plan for the cold weather. Exposure to cold can cause life-threatening health conditions such as hypothermia and frostbite.

Hypothermia: symptoms include slurred speech, sluggishness, confusion, dizziness, shallow breathing, unusual behavior and slow, irregular heartbeat.

Frostbite: symptoms include gray, white or yellow skin discoloration, numbness, and waxy feeling skin.

Tips for Staying Warm

Avoid serious conditions such as frostbite and hypothermia, by taking 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.

What to Do if You Lose Heat or Hot Water at Home

Any New York City tenant without adequate heat or hot water should first speak with the building owner, manager or superintendent. If the problem is not corrected, tenants should call 311. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) will attempt to contact the building's owner to get heat or hot water service restored. If service is not been restored, HPD will send an inspector to the building to verify the complaint and immediately issue a violation. If a landlord does not live up to his or her legal obligation, HPD will call in emergency contractors (billed to the landlord or management agent) to fix the boiler or do whatever is required to get the heat and hot water working again.

Take measures to trap existing warm air, and safely stay warm until heat returns, including:

- 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.
- If the cold persists and your heat is not restored, call family, neighbors or friends to see if you can stay with them.
- Open your faucets to a steady drip so pipes do not freeze.

Safe Home Heating Tips

Improper use of portable heating equipment can lead to fire or dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. Take precautions to ensure you are heating your home safely.

Fire Safety Tips

- 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 them.
- 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.
- Make sure you have a working smoke detector in every room. Check and change batteries often.

Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips

- Make sure all fuel-burning items - such as furnaces, boilers, hot water heaters, and clothes dryers - are operating properly, ventilated and regularly inspected by a professional in order to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you have a working fireplace, keep chimneys clean and clear of debris.
- Never turn on your oven to heat your kitchen, or operate gas or charcoal barbecue grills, kerosene- or oil-burning heater in an enclosed space.
- Common signs of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache dizziness, chest pain, nausea.
- If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, call 911, and get the victim to fresh air immediately, and open windows.
- Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector.

If You Need Emergency Heating Assistance

The Human Resources Administration (HRA) administers the federal Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), which provides low-income people with emergency heating assistance. Eligible residents will receive a payment for fuel delivery, or HRA will arrange for fuel delivery or boiler repair. Emergency assistance is given to those who qualify only once per heating season. Call 311 for more information.

How to Help Others

- If you suspect a person is suffering from frostbite or hypothermia, bring him or her someplace warm and seek medical help immediately or call 911.
- If medical help is unavailable, re-warm the person, starting at the core of their body. Warming arms and legs first can increase circulation of cold blood to the heart, which can lead to heart failure. Use a blanket, or if necessary, your own body heat to warm the person.
- Do not give a person suffering frostbite or hypothermia alcohol or caffeine, both of which can worsen the condition. Instead, give the patient a cup of warm broth.
- Infants and the elderly are at increased risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Check on vulnerable friends, relatives and neighbors to ensure they are adequately protected from the cold.

Homeless Services Code Blue In Effect - Outreach Efforts Double

Tonight, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) announced Code Blue procedures will take effect at 8 p.m. and continue until 8 a.m. the next morning. Tonight's code will be a Level 2, meaning a weather prediction of a temperature or wind chill of 20 degrees or below.

During Code Blue procedures, DHS doubles both its outreach vans and outreach personnel to protect unsheltered individuals from death. Outreach teams are specifically trained to assess the health of unsheltered individuals and evaluate potential symptoms of cold weather distress, such as hypothermia and frostbite. During a Code Blue, outreach teams check on vulnerable clients every two hours, or four times per shift.

To supplement the professional expertise of Homeless Services outreach workers, the agency encourages citizens to dial 311 if they suspect a person is in need. Calls placed by concerned New Yorkers serve as valuable resources for deploying assistance to where it is needed most.

While a Code Blue is underway, clients can access any Homeless Services adult facility, including shelters and Safe Havens, without pursuing the usual steps of entering an intake center. Beds are available system wide to accommodate all walk-in clients or those brought in by outreach workers. All facilities are also open as warming centers for those who want to come in from the cold.

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