



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OFFERS COLD WEATHER  
SAFETY TIPS**

With weekend temperatures expected to be at or below 30 degrees, the New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) reminds New Yorkers to protect themselves and help others who may be at increased risk of health problems from the cold. Seniors, infants, the homeless, and those with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk. If you know of friends, neighbors, or family members who may be at risk check in on them to sure their heat is working and that they are OK.

Health problems resulting from prolonged exposure to cold include hypothermia and frostbite, which are described below. In addition, influenza is a major preventable cause of illness and death during the wintertime. Cold, dry weather and more time spent indoors can contribute to the spread of influenza. For New Yorkers who have not yet gotten a flu shot this season, it's not too late. Call your regular doctor or 311 for more information.

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

The 2009/2010 heat season began on October 1, 2009, and continues through May 31, 2010. During heat season, residential owners with tenants are required by law to maintain an indoor temperature of at least 68 degrees Fahrenheit between 6 AM and 10 PM when the outdoor temperature falls below 55 degrees. Between 10 PM and 6 AM, building owners must maintain an indoor temperature of 55 degrees when the outside temperature falls below 40 degrees. Hot water is required to be maintained at 120 degrees.

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 take measures to ensure that your heat and hot water is restored. This may include contacting the building's owner or sending an inspector to verify the complaint or issue a violation. In some cases, HPD will call in emergency contractors to resolve the issue and bill the landlord for the repairs. HPD also may initiate legal action against properties that are issued heat violations, and owners who incur multiple heat violations are subject to litigation seeking maximum litigation penalties and to continued scrutiny on heat and other code deficiencies.

During the last heat season (2008/2009):

- 248,147 heat and hot water problems were reported to the City through 311.
- HPD inspectors made 139,472 heat related inspections.

- HPD inspectors wrote 14,108 heat related violations.
- HPD spent a total of \$6.1 million in heat related emergency repairs (charged to building owners).
- HPD filed 4,016 heat cases in court and collected \$2,244,260 in fines.

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 the heat 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.
- Do not use your oven or fuel-burning space heaters to heat your home. These can release carbon monoxide, a deadly gas that you cannot see or smell.
- Open your faucets to a steady drip so pipes do not freeze.

### **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.

### **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. Space heaters are temporary heating devices and should only be used for a limited time each day.
- 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.
- Never leave children alone in the room where a space heater is running. Always keep an eye on heating equipment. Turn it off when you are unable to closely monitor it.
- Plug space heaters directly into a wall outlet. Never use an extension cord or power strip. Do not plug anything else into the same outlet when the space heater is in use. Do not use space heaters with frayed or damaged cords.
- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm in every room. Test them at least once a month and change the batteries twice a year.

- If you are going to use an electric blanket, only use one that is less than 10 years old from the date of purchase. Also avoid tucking the electric blanket in at the sides of the bed. Only purchase blankets with an automatic safety shut-off.

#### Carbon monoxide safety tips:

- Carbon monoxide comes from the burning of fuel. Therefore, make sure all fuel-burning devices such as furnaces, boilers, hot water heaters, and clothes dryers are properly vented to the outdoors and operating properly. If you are not sure, contact a professional to inspect and make necessary repairs.
- Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector. Most homes and residential buildings in New York City are required by law to have carbon monoxide detectors installed near all sleeping areas. Owners are responsible for installing approved carbon monoxide detectors. Occupants are responsible for keeping and maintaining the carbon monoxide detectors in good repair.
- If you have a working fireplace keep chimneys clean and clear of debris.
- Never heat your home with a gas stove or oven, charcoal barbecue grill, or kerosene, propane, or oil-burning heaters.
- The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are non-specific and include headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, sleepiness, trouble breathing, and loss of consciousness. Severe poisonings may result in permanent injury or death.
- If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, call 911, get the victim to fresh air immediately, and open windows.

#### **Staying Warm Outdoors**

Exposure to cold can be life-threatening. 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.
- Drinking alcohol may make you think you feel warmer but actually increases your chances of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Shivering is an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Shivering is a signal to return indoors.
- Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold. Remember, your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so don't overdo it.
- Workers in construction and utilities, and others who spend a lot of time outdoors are at risk for cold-related disorders. Employers should implement safe work practices, provide appropriate protective equipment, and train workers on health effects of cold weather,

proper prevention techniques, and treatment of cold-related disorders. For more information, see: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/).

### **How to Help Others**

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. Check on friends, relatives, and neighbors who may need assistance to ensure they are adequately protected from the cold.
- **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.

Provide first aid:

- If you suspect a person is suffering from frostbite or hypothermia, bring him or her someplace warm and call 911.
- If medical help is not immediately available, re-warm the person, by removing any damp clothing and covering them with warm blankets.

### **Homeless Outreach**

The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) continues to use its Cold Weather Emergency Procedure, called Code Blue, to protect unsheltered homeless people, who are more at risk for exposure deaths during the cold winter months. During Code Blue conditions DHS doubles its outreach efforts. Community members that identify someone on the street they believe needs assistance should call 311 and ask for the Mobile Outreach Response Team. The Department of Homeless Services will send an outreach team to the location to assess the individual's condition and take appropriate action.

Outreach workers are on the streets 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are trained to:

- Identify and regularly monitor people who may be at risk during cold weather.
- Assist at-risk people to voluntarily come indoors.

During a Code Blue Cold Weather Emergency, housing options for the homeless include the following:

- **Shelters:** During an emergency, homeless people can access any shelter. Beds are available system-wide to accommodate anyone brought in by outreach teams or walk-ins.

- **Drop-in centers:** All drop-in centers are open 24 hours a day when Code Blue procedures are in effect, taking in as many as people as possible for the duration of inclement weather. Drop-in staff also can make arrangements for homeless people at other citywide facilities.
- **Safe havens and stabilization beds:** Chronically homeless people may be transported to these low-threshold housing options where they may go directly from the street to a bed.

For more information about cold weather safety and how you can prepare for emergencies call 311 or visit [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem).

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**CONTACT:** Chris Gilbride (OEM)

718-422-4888