



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) recommends New Yorkers take steps to plan for the cold.

Tips for Staying Warm

Exposure to cold can cause life-threatening health conditions. 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.

HOW TO HELP OTHERS

Exposure to cold can cause life-threatening health conditions. Recognize symptoms of cold weather illnesses such as frostbite and hypothermia. **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.

- 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.
- 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.

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.

The Department of Homeless Services has directed the City's Homeless Intake Centers to serve temporarily as drop-in centers where any homeless New Yorker can come to warm up, and to take in as many people as possible within the limitations of the fire code. Drop-in staff can also make arrangements for clients at other facilities citywide. Homeless Services has also temporarily suspended its shelter intake procedures that link a comprehensive range of medical and social service programs together in order to let homeless individuals access the warmth of an available shelter as quickly as possible. Beds are available system-wide to accommodate all clients brought in by outreach teams or those who walk-ins. Also, City shelters will not suspend any individuals during the cold emergency.

The Department of Homeless Services has also expanded its Cold Weather Emergency Procedure, which usually is in operation from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. when temperatures fall below 32 degrees Fahrenheit, to operate 24 hours a day. The Department of Homeless Service outreach workers, supplemented by Department of Health and Mental Hygiene personnel, are helping homeless New Yorkers to voluntarily come indoors, arranging for involuntary transport of at-risk homeless when appropriate, and calling 911 for any homeless individual who is actively drinking alcohol, hallucinating and/or grossly disorganized. When temperatures drop below freezing, Homeless Services outreach staff are trained to understand the dangers of cold weather. They utilize all the resources at their disposal to bring the person inside, including calling 911. Members of the Police Department focus more closely on homeless individuals during cold emergencies and will summon medical services or transport individuals to shelter as necessary.

Last night, Homeless Services conducted an additional training session and deployed additional staff, vans and drivers, to Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and The Bronx, doubling the outreach coverage on the streets. Homeless Services will also double its outreach in Manhattan tonight.

The City's Department for the Aging also encourages older New Yorkers to visit one of the City 329 senior centers for warmth, companionship, and a nutritious hot meal.

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