



NEWS RELEASE

St. Charles County Government
Department of Community Health and the Environment

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PREPARE FOR WINTER WEATHER BEFORE IT ARRIVES

How Can You Keep Yourself, Your Family, Pets Safe in Winter?

St. Charles County, Missouri – When temperatures drop, staying warm and safe can become difficult. Preventative action taken now — before winter storms arrive — is the best defense against future cold-weather conditions.

Extreme temperatures can cause serious health problems — especially with infants and the elderly. When exposed to cold temperatures, a person’s body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. A body temperature that is too low is termed “hypothermia” and can affect brain function. Signs of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, mental slowness and lethargy, clumsiness, slurred speech, drowsiness, and unexplained exhaustion (severe symptoms include a fall in blood pressure, shallow breathing, and coma). If a person’s body temperature drops below 95° Fahrenheit, immediate medical attention is required. To help raise this temperature while seeking medical attention, remove any wet clothing and move the person to a room with a temperature of at least 68° F (focusing on efforts to warm the core of the body). If conscious, they may drink warm, non-alcoholic beverages, eat a hot meal, and wrap themselves in a warm blanket.

Another concern in cold temperatures is frostbite, which is an injury to body tissue caused by freezing. Symptoms of frostbite include pain in the affected skin area, a change in skin appearance (reddish, bluish or whitish coloring), numbness and stiffness. If untreated, frostbite can result in frozen extremities and possibly amputation. To prevent frostbite, protect skin from direct exposure to cold air and from exposure to intensely cold wind.

Wearing proper clothing and minimizing outdoor physical activity are important steps in preventing harmful effects during cold weather months. Appropriate clothing such as a hat, a scarf to cover the face and mouth, sleeves that are snug at the wrist, mittens (they are warmer than gloves), a waterproof coat and shoes, and several layers of loose-fitting clothing will help protect against the cold. Be aware that many prescription drugs may make you more sensitive to the cold, so check with your physician or pharmacist to find out if your medication falls in this category. Overexertion while shoveling snow can lead to heart strain, and excessive perspiration can increase chances for hypothermia.

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The best way to avoid physical harms is to remain in a warm shelter. When heating your home, follow manufacturer's instructions for proper operations and ensure adequate ventilation to minimize the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. If a heater-unit has any damage or produces sparks, do not use. In addition, make certain that heaters are an adequate distance away from any flammable materials (such as drapes, furniture, or bedding). Check your fireplace now, before the cold temperatures arrive, to make certain the flue is clear and the chimney is clean. In the event that your home loses access to electricity or you do not have adequate heating, you can find a list of area warming centers on the United Way Missouri's website <http://www.211missouri.org> or by calling 2-1-1 from a landline phone.

With snow-covered or icy roads, traveling in winter weather can become treacherous. Plan ahead and keep extra supplies in your trunk, including jumper cables, a flashlight and food/water. If you are trapped in your car or stranded during a winter storm, remain in your vehicle and periodically run the engine/heater for 10 minutes each hour to keep warm (remember to slightly open a downwind window and clear the exhaust pipe for ventilation). To help rescuers locate your car, use your cell phone to call for help and tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna or roof.

It's up to you to protect your pets as well. It is always best to bring pets indoors in cold weather. If that is not possible, provide a safe shelter for them that is off the ground, protected from the wind, has a door flap, and is insulated with extra straw for bedding. As temperatures drop, an outdoor animal will require additional feed, particularly protein, because their bodies have to work harder to stay warm, and be sure to check water bowls for freezing. When walking your dog, be sure to keep him or her on leash and to avoid salt, which can be potentially dangerous if ingested and harmful to sensitive paws. Outdoor cats and wildlife sometimes seek shelter under the hood of cars, so bang loudly on the car hood to allow them to escape before starting the engine. For additional cold weather safety tips or for suggestions on building a protective shelter, please call the St. Charles County Pet Adoption Center at (636) 949-PETS.

The St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment is committed to the protection and enhancement of health and the quality of life for all members of our community. For information on programs offered and to discover ways the Department assists our community, please visit www.scchealth.org or call 636-949-7400.

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