

Health and Welfare Alert



Stay Safe in Winter Weather #52-12-21

Winter Weather Considerations

As a professional, you play an important role in winter safety. People with developmental disabilities are at high risk for injury due to falls and exposure to inclement weather. Those providing care can reduce these risks and seek immediate medical care when needed. You can help people be prepared for colder weather, make safe decisions about what to wear, when to stay in, how to prevent falling, and safeguard against house fires. There are a lot of things to consider, and we appreciate all your efforts to make sure people are safe and happy this winter season. Here are some winter weather considerations.

Getting Around

- Be sure to keep your sidewalks clear of snow and ice. Make sure you have supplies like salt and shovels before you need them.
- Always check the weather and traffic reports before leaving during extreme temperatures and conditions. Talk with the person and weigh the risks and benefits of going out. Avoid driving on icy roads unless necessary.
- Put a cold weather kit in your car that includes ice scrapers, blankets, food and water, jumper cables, flares, tire pump, a bag of sand or cat litter, compass and maps, flashlight, extra batteries, and first-aid kit. Make sure you have adequate windshield wiper fluid on hand.
- Using a wheelchair in the snow can be difficult and take extra time. Make sure that pathways are clear before helping someone using a wheelchair in the snow and ice.
- Dress warmly and in layers when going out. Have a good pair of gloves, hat, and winter coat to wear and encourage the people you support in doing the same. Set a good example.



Fast Facts:

- Since 2007, 24 people with developmental disabilities, have died due to fire. In 75 percent of the deaths, the person resided in their family home. Inadequate smoke detectors, unsafe heating sources, and improper storage of combustibles contributed to the fatal fires.
- Frostbite can occur in as little as 10 minutes when skin is exposed to temps that are -10 F according to emergency room physician Stephen Meldon, MD at the Cleveland Clinic.
- Falls account for the highest number of Significant Injury MUIs. Winter conditions such as ice and uncleared walkways/parking lots contributed to many falls.
- According to the Nation Fire Protection Association, more than one-third of home decoration fires are started by candles.
- December, January, and February are the leading months for home heating fires.



Protect Against Frostbite

Frostbite is when the skin freezes. It often affects fingers, toes, and exposed skin, like the face, nose, and ears. Signs can include gray, white, or yellow skin; skin that looks waxy; or numbness.

Call 9-1-1. Don't rub a person's frostbitten skin. Warm the area slowly, but don't use heating pads.

Know the Signs of Hypothermia

Hypothermia is when the body loses too much heat and can't work properly. Symptoms can include cold feet and hands, pale skin, severe shivering, slurred speech, dizziness, trouble staying balanced, or a slow pulse. Older adults and those with certain medical conditions lose body heat faster than younger people. Because of this, cold weather is more dangerous to them and can cause a case of hypothermia quickly.

If you notice any of these signs, take the person's temperature.

- If it is below 95 degrees, the situation is an emergency; get medical attention immediately. Call 9-1-1.

If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, as follows:

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- If the person is wearing any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first: chest, neck, head, and groin, using an electric blanket if available, or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.



Home Safety

- Only use space heaters if absolutely necessary. Read and follow all safety precautions provided with the heater. When heaters are used improperly risks of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning increase. Never leave the heater on while you sleep.
- Make sure that there is nothing within three-feet of a space heater. This includes papers, curtains, furniture, and pillows. Make sure anything flammable is far away.
- Check carbon monoxide and smoke detectors to make sure they work, have good batteries, and are placed appropriately.

Holiday Decorating

- Be careful with holiday decorations. Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant.
- Use flameless candles to decorate.
- If you are decorating with a live tree, make sure it is not near any heating sources.

Winter Weather MUIs

- A 26-year-old man was using a space heater with diesel fuel to heat his home. He was found unconscious and despite getting quick medical care, he died of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- While walking in the unshoveled restaurant parking lot, a 62-year-old woman fell, hitting her head. Staff took immediate action by calling 9-1-1 and providing care. Unfortunately, she later passed away due to her injuries.
- A 24-year-old man was riding on the interstate in a car driven by a family member one morning. They were involved in a multiple car pile-up due to inclement winter weather, which resulted in multiple people being injured and the young man's death.

