

Safety Tips

With its cold and often stormy weather, winter presents many safety challenges both indoors and out. Being prepared and following simple safety tips can help you stay safe and warm this season.

Keeping Your Home Safe And Warm

Follow these safety tips from CDC, the National Fire Protection Association, and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to prevent injuries and deaths related to heating your home.

- Install a smoke alarm near bedrooms and on each floor of your home. Test it monthly. If it has a 9-volt battery, change the battery once a year.
 - Install a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm near bedrooms and on each floor of your home. If your alarm sounds, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission suggests that you press the reset button, call emergency services (911 or your local fire department), and immediately move to fresh air (either outdoors or near an open door or window). Know the symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, fatigue, dizziness, and shortness of breath. If you experience any of these symptoms, get fresh air right away and contact a doctor for proper diagnosis.
 - Make sure heating equipment is installed properly. Have a trained specialist inspect and tune up your heating system each year.
 - Keep portable space heaters at least 3 feet from anything that can burn, including bedding, furniture, and clothing. Never drape clothing over a space heater to dry.
 - Keep children and pets away from space heaters. Never leave children in a room alone when a space heater is in use.
 - If you use a kerosene heater, use only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. Never put gasoline in a kerosene heater--it could explode. Before you refuel the heater, turn it off and let it cool down. Refuel outside only.
 - When using a kerosene heater, keep a door open to the rest of the house or open a window slightly. This will reduce the chance of carbon monoxide build-up in the room.
 - Have your fireplace chimney and flue inspected each year and cleaned if needed. Open the flue and use a sturdy fireplace screen when you have a fire. Burn only untreated wood; never burn paper or pine branches--pieces can float out the chimney and ignite your roof, a neighbor's roof, or nearby trees.
 - If you use a wood-burning stove, have the chimney connection and flue checked each year. Make sure the stove is placed on an approved stove board to protect the floor from heat and coals.
 - Never use your range or oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
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Surviving A Winter Storm

*To survive a snow or ice storm, follow these safety tips from *Extreme Cold: A prevention guide to promote your personal health and safety*, a publication of CDC's National Center for Environmental Health (see "Safety Resources" for more information about this booklet).*

- Be prepared. Before cold weather hits, make sure you have a way to heat your home during a power failure. Keep a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher nearby when using alternative heating sources.
- Keep on hand extra blankets, flashlights with extra batteries, matches, a first aid kit, manual can opener, snow shovel and rock salt, and special needs items (e.g., diapers).
- Stock a few days' supply of water, required medications, and food that does not need to be refrigerated or cooked.

- Monitor the temperature of your home. Infants and persons over age 65 are especially susceptible to cold. If it's not possible to keep your home warm, stay with friends or family or in a shelter.
 - Dress in several layers to maintain body heat. Covering up with blankets can also conserve heat.
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Clearing Snow And Ice

Clearing snow and ice from driveways and sidewalks is hard work. To prevent injuries, follow these safety tips from the National Safety Council, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, and other prevention organizations.

- Dress warmly, paying special attention to feet, hands, nose, and ears.
 - Avoid shoveling snow if you are out of shape. If you have a history of heart trouble, do not shovel snow unless your doctor says it's okay.
 - Do light warm-up exercises before shoveling and take frequent breaks.
 - If possible, push snow in front of you. If you have to lift it, pick up small amounts and lift with your legs, not your back. Do not toss snow over your shoulder or to the side.
 - Don't drink alcohol before or while shoveling snow. Never smoke while shoveling.
 - Use rock salt or de-icing compounds to remove ice from steps, walkways, and sidewalks. Sand placed on walkways may also help prevent slipping.
 - If you use a snow blower (also called a snow thrower), follow these safety guidelines:
 - Read the owner's manual before starting your snow blower. Make sure you understand all the recommended safety steps.
 - Make sure all people and pets are out of the way before you begin.
 - Do not put your hand in the snow blower to remove impacted snow or debris. Turn the machine off and wait a few seconds. Then use a stick or broom handle to remove the material.
 - Do not leave the snow blower unattended when it is running.
 - Fill up with fuel before you start, when the engine is cool.
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Driving Safely In Winter Weather

Snow, ice, and extreme cold can make driving treacherous. These safety tips from CDC, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the National Safety Council can help make winter car travel safer.

- Before winter arrives, have your car tuned up, check the level of antifreeze, make sure the battery is good, and check your tire tread or put on snow tires.
- Keep emergency gear in your car for everyday trips:
 - cell phone
 - flashlight
 - jumper cables
 - sand or kitty litter (for traction)
 - ice scraper, snow brush, and small shovel
 - blankets
 - warning devices (e.g., flares, reflectors)
- For long car trips, keep food, water, extra blankets, and required medication on hand.
- Avoid driving in snow or ice storms. If you must travel in bad weather, drive slowly. Let someone know what route you're taking and when you plan to arrive so they can alert authorities if you don't get there.

- If your car is parked outside, make sure the exhaust pipe and the area around it are free of snow before you start the car. Snow packed in or around the exhaust pipe can cause high levels of carbon monoxide in the car.
 - Don't sit in a parked car with the engine running unless a window is open. Do not let your car run while parked in a garage.
 - If your car stalls or gets stuck in snow, light two flares and place one at each end of the car, a safe distance away. Make sure snow has not blocked the exhaust pipe. Then stay in your vehicle and open a window slightly to let in fresh air. Wrap yourself in blankets and run your vehicle's heater for a few minutes every hour to keep warm.
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Walking In A Winter Wonderland

Walking in icy, snowy weather can be dangerous, but these tips from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration can help make your trek safer.

- Dress in layers and wear boots with nonskid soles. Wear a bright scarf or hat or reflective gear so drivers can see you.
 - Walk on sidewalks if possible. If sidewalks are covered in snow and ice and you must walk in the street, walk against the flow of traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
 - Don't wear a hat or scarf that blocks your vision or makes it hard for you to hear traffic.
 - When traveling with babies or small children, dress them in bright or reflective clothing. Always keep children--whether in a stroller or on foot--in front of you and as close to the curb as possible.
 - Before you step off the curb, make sure oncoming cars and trucks have come to a complete stop.
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The Problem: Who Is Affected?

Many injuries occur each winter as people try to keep their homes warm and get around in cold, stormy weather. Home Fires December, January, and February are the leading months for home fires and associated deaths in the United States. About one-third of the 3,250 home-fire deaths in 1998 occurred during these three months. Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home-fire deaths in the U.S. and the leading cause during December and January. Hypothermia Each year, more than 700 people die of hypothermia (low body temperature) caused by extended exposure to cold temperatures both indoors and out. About half of these deaths are among persons age 65 and older; men in this age group are more likely than women to die from hypothermia. Risk factors for hypothermia include older age; alcohol abuse; homelessness; poverty; mental illness; chronic diseases such as hypothyroidism; dehydration and malnutrition; and prolonged exposure to materials that promote heat loss (e.g., water, metal).

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Each year, more than 200 Americans die from carbon monoxide poisoning. (CO is produced by fuel-burning motor vehicles, appliances, and heating systems.) In addition, several thousand individuals are treated in emergency departments for CO poisoning. The risk of CO poisoning increases during the winter, as more people run furnaces and space heaters and use fireplaces. Deaths from CO poisoning also occur when people sit in an idling vehicle with the doors and windows closed. One CDC study found that motor-vehicle-related CO poisoning exposures increase during winter months and that death rates from CO poisoning in stationary motor vehicles are highest in states with colder average winter temperatures. During just two days in January 1996, 22 people in New York City died from CO poisoning because their exhaust pipes were packed with snow, and CO backed up into the vehicle.

Driving-Related Injuries and Deaths

In 1998, 131,000 motor vehicle crashes occurred during sleet and snowy conditions. Of these crashes, 30,000 resulted in injuries; more than 600 resulted in deaths. Snow Blower Injuries

Snow blowers (or snow throwers) are the fourth leading cause of finger amputations associated with consumer products. These machines cause more than 5,300 emergency department visits and 1,000 amputations each year. Nine deaths related to snow blowers have been reported since 1992.

Safety Resources

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) View AAOS's fact sheet on snow-shoveling safety at <http://www.aaos.org/wordhtml/press/snowshov.htm> or call 800-346-2267.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

CDC's National Center for Environmental Health offers Extreme Cold: A prevention guide to promote your personal health and safety, which provides important tips for preparing your home and car for winter, surviving winter storms, and preventing and treating hypothermia and frostbite. On the web at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/programs/emergenc/prevent/cold/cold.htm> Or call the NCEH Health Line, 888-232-6789.

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) On CPSC's web site, www.cpsc.gov, you can search for information about preventing carbon monoxide poisoning and using space heaters safely. CPSC's phone number is 800-638-2772. For TTY, call 800-638-8270.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) NFPA has seasonal fire prevention tips for consumers and families. Visit their web site at <http://www.nfpa.org/education> or call 617-984-7275.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) NHTSA offers winter driving and walking safety tips. On the web, visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hot/winter/winter2.html>

National Safety Council (NSC) NSC has fact sheets on preparing your car for winter, surviving cold weather, and shoveling snow safely. Visit <http://www.nsc.org/lrs/lib/facts.htm> or call 800-621-7619.

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The data and safety tips in this fact sheet were obtained from the following sources:

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