



FEMA #WinterReady Toolkit

Winter storms and blizzards can bring extreme cold, freezing rain, snow, ice, and high winds. These conditions create a higher risk of car accidents, hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, and heart attacks from overexertion. Our [#WinterReady campaign](#) toolkit offers guidance and resources on how families can take action to stay safe during hazardous weather.

Key Messages

- Extremely cold temperatures can cause frostbite, hypothermia, and even death. Get tips on how [to protect yourself in bitter cold weather](#).
- Home heating is the second leading cause of home fires, and winter is when most home fires happen. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your house.
- When driving, increase your following distance from 3-4 seconds to 5-6 seconds. It takes longer to slow down and stop on icy roads.
- If there is a winter storm warning in your area, there's a good chance that heavy snow, sleet, and freezing rain are headed your way. It's a good idea to find shelter right away.
- Generators can cause carbon monoxide poisoning, fires, and electrocution if they are not used properly. Learn how to [operate a generator safely](#).
- Be prepared for winter weather at home, at work and in your car. Keep emergency supplies at each location.

Know your winter weather terms and take appropriate action

Winter storm warning

A Winter Storm Warning is issued when heavy snow, heavy sleet or heavy freezing rain are imminent or occurring. Winter Storm Warnings are usually issued 12 to 24 hours before the hazardous weather is expected to begin.

Winter storm watch

A Winter Storm Watch is issued when there is the possibility of a blizzard, heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or heavy sleet. Winter Storm Watches are usually issued 12 to 48 hours before the beginning of a Winter Storm.

Winter weather advisory

A Winter Weather Advisory is issued when accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and sleet are expected to cause significant inconveniences and life-threatening situations, if caution is not taken.

Know your risk for winter storms

Listen to weather reports to get updates about freezing weather and winter storms. Pay attention to emergency alerts and heed the instructions of your local officials. Sign up for your community's warning system.

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) Weather Radio](#) also provide emergency alerts.

Preparing for winter weather

Prepare to keep the cold out of your home with insulation, caulking and weather stripping. Learn how to keep pipes from freezing. Install and test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors with battery backups. Gather supplies in case you need to stay home for several days without power. Have extra batteries for weather radios and flashlights.

Be sure to keep each person's specific needs in mind, including the medications they take. Also, remember the needs of your pets.

If you are unable to afford your heating costs, weatherization, or energy-related home repairs, contact the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#) for help.

In case of an emergency

Be prepared for winter weather at home, at work and in your car. Create an emergency supply kit for your car. Include jumper cables, sand, a flashlight, warm clothes, blankets, bottled water, and non-perishable snacks. Keep a full tank of gas.

Learn the signs and basic treatments for frostbite and hypothermia

Frostbite causes loss of feeling and color around the face, fingers, and toes. Signs include numbness, white or grayish-yellow skin, and firm or waxy skin. To treat frostbite, go to a warm room. Soak in warm water. Use body heat to warm. Do not massage or use a heating pad.

Hypothermia is an unusually low body temperature. A temperature below 95 degrees is an emergency. Signs include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, or drowsiness. To treat hypothermia, go to a warm room. Warm the center of the body first — chest, neck, head, and groin. Keep dry and wrap your body in warm blankets, including your head and neck.

Generator safety

Generators can be helpful when the power goes out. It is important to know how use them safely to prevent [carbon monoxide \(CO\) poisoning](#) and other hazards.

- Generators and fuel should always be used outdoors and at least 20 feet away from windows, doors and attached garages.
- Install working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can kill you, your family, and pets.
- Keep the generator dry and protected from rain or flooding. Touching a wet generator or devices connected to one can cause electrical shock.
- Always connect the generator to appliances with heavy-duty extension cords.
- Let the generator cool before refueling. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts can ignite.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions *carefully*.

Preventing house heating fires

Although trending downward since the early 1980s, heating fires remained the second leading cause of home fires in 2021. An estimated 32,200 home heating *fires* were reported to fire departments within the United States. These fires caused an estimated 190 deaths, 625 injuries and \$442 million in property loss.

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet from all heat sources including fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, portable heaters, or candles.
- Always plug space heaters directly into an outlet, and make sure its cord isn't damaged or frayed.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.

- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected each year by a professional.
- Visit the U.S. Fire Administration [Home Fires page](#) to learn about how to prepare for and prevent home fires including tips for [individuals with disabilities](#) and [older adults](#).

[Learn more](#) about preventing home fires.

Preparing for power outages

Winter storms may bring power outages that can disrupt things like phone service, utilities, transportation, stores, gas stations and ATMs, and prevent your ability to use electrically powered medical devices. It's important to be prepared for power outages.

- Keep freezers and refrigerators closed. Throw away any food that has not been exposed to temperatures below 40 degrees for two hours or more, or that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- If you use a generator, ONLY use it outdoors and away from windows.
- Do not use a gas stove or oven to heat your home.
- Disconnect appliances and electronics to avoid damage from electrical surges.
- Have alternate plans for refrigerating medicines or using power-dependent medical devices.
- If the cold is too extreme and you cannot heat your home, go to a community center or other community location that has power and heat.

[Get more](#) power outage tips.

Stay safe during winter travel

Travel during the winter has unique risks, especially if you travel by car. Being prepared can help you “expect the unexpected” so your trip isn't ruined by the common problems that travelers face in the winter.

Know before you go

- From blizzards, to [avalanches](#) and ice storms, be aware of the [winter risks](#) in places you visit. Check the local weather forecasts and warnings before heading out. Visit [National Weather Service](#) for up-to-date forecasts and [download the FEMA App](#) for alerts in up to five locations.

- Check your local weather and traffic reports before heading out.
- If your roads are not in good shape, consider postponing non-essential travel until the roads are cleared. If you do have to go out, make sure you are prepared in case you become delayed while traveling.

On the road

- Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition before you travel.
- Keep your gas tank as full as you can. A full tank will also keep the fuel line from freezing.
- Install good winter tires and make sure they have enough tread, or any chains or studs required in your local area.
- When driving, [increase your following distance](#) from 3-4 seconds to 5-6 seconds. It takes longer to slow down and stop on icy roads.
- Every vehicle should have an [emergency supply kit](#) in the trunk. Kits should be checked every six months and expired items should be replaced regularly.
- Keep family and emergency phone numbers, including your auto insurance provider and a towing company in your phone.
- Consider keeping a power bank for your phone in your car in case your car loses power.
- [If stranded](#), run the engine for about 10 minutes per hour to run the heater and charge your cellphone. Open a window slightly to let fresh air in and avoid [carbon monoxide \(CO\) poisoning](#).
- Tell others about the route you will be taking and let them know your anticipated arrival time.

Tips for your specific needs

Some people have situations that need a little more attention. Whether you need [low-cost solutions for home heating](#), are an [older adult](#), [work or play outside](#), or [don't typically experience winter weather](#), we have tips for you.

Low cost tips for keeping your home warm

To save on heating bills, close the doors of rooms you are not using. Close the vents and shut the doors in these rooms and keep the basement door closed. Place a rolled towel at the bottom of all doors to keep drafts out.

About 30% of a home's heating energy is lost through its windows. Keep window coverings like blinds or curtains open during the day to take advantage of the sun's heat in the winter – especially windows that get direct sunlight. Close them at night to keep heat from escaping. If you have gaps around the windows, try using weather stripping or caulk to keep the cold air out. You can also apply inexpensive window insulation kits that create an airtight seal around windows.

You may be eligible for the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#), which can help you pay your heating bills or get emergency services during an energy crisis. For home improvements that save money on energy, you may qualify for help through the [Weatherization Assistance Program \(WAP\)](#).

Winter preparedness for older adults

Use the worksheets and checklists in the [Take Control in 1, 2, 3—Disaster Preparedness Guide for Older Adults](#) to create your plan, then add it to your emergency kit or put it on your refrigerator as a visible reminder that you are prepared.

The CDC recommends friends, family members, or caregivers follow some tips on keeping an older adult during the winter months:

- Engage your support network if you need help clearing ice and snow from your property so you can keep outside walkways and steps clear of snow and ice.
- Low lighting is a major cause of falls, so make sure there is enough lighting outdoors, especially near walkways and stairs.
- Have the name and contact information of a nearby family member or friend who can regularly check in on you.
- Make sure your steps are sturdy and have textured grip to [reduce falls](#) if the weather is icy or wet.
- If you use walking aids such as a cane, walker, or a wheelchair, dry the wheels or tips of each before entering your home.

- Keep a small table or shelf near the entry door to put items while unlocking the door. This reduces distractions and dangers of slipping or tripping while trying to enter your home.
- If your home's main entrance is often icy during the winter months, use a different entrance if you can. Stay warm by dressing warmly and remember to eat enough food to keep yourself at a healthy weight.

Winter safety when working or recreating outside

Be careful if you work outdoors or participate in recreational activities in cold weather. Always have a fully charged cellphone and carry a portable recharger, if possible.

If you cannot avoid extremely cold situations, follow these recommendations to protect yourself:

- Wear several layers of loose clothing. Layering provides better insulation.
- Make sure to protect the ears, face, hands, and feet in extremely cold weather. Boots should be waterproof and insulated. Wearing a hat will keep your whole-body warmer.
- Move into warm locations during work breaks and try to limit the amount of time outside on extremely cold days.
- Carry cold weather gear such as extra socks, gloves, hats, jacket, blankets, a change of clothes and a thermos of hot liquid.
- Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin.

Be prepared, even if winter weather does not occur often where you live

- Pay attention to local weather forecasts and follow advice from local officials.
- Winter storms may cause power outages. [Learn what to do before, during and after the power goes out](#) and how to [use a portable generator safely](#).
- Talk to neighbors who may have experienced extreme winter weather in the past. They may have valuable tips and advice.
- Learn how to heat your home safely to [prevent home fires](#) and carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Turn off and drain the water from outdoor water spigots. Disconnect and drain garden hoses and store them in a garage or shed.

Images and graphics

This **#WinterReady** poster can be used online and printed for display in offices, schools, local stores, and other public spaces. Download it at: go.dhs.gov/UDL.



Additional PSAs and graphics, such as the ones below, are available for you to use on a variety of social media platforms. You can find them at [#WinterReady | Ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov/winter-ready). Check back often for updated campaign resources and other shareable messaging.



Associated content

Learn more information about preparedness for winter storms through the following links:

Social media toolkits

- [#WinterReady Safety Graphics](#)

- [Holiday Safety Social Media Toolkit | Ready.gov](#)

Resources for staying warm

- [Extreme Cold Prevention Guide | CDC](#) and [Extreme Cold Guide Prevention Guide 508 pages | CDC](#)
- [Between Extremes: Health Effects of Heat and Cold | NIH.gov](#)
- [Workplace Solutions: Preventing Cold-related Illness, Injury, and Death among Workers | CDC.gov](#)

Winterproof your home

- [Fall and Winter Energy-Saving Tips | Department of Energy](#)
- [Energy Saver Guide: Tips on Saving Money and Energy at Home | Department of Energy](#)
- [Making Our Homes More Efficient: Clean Energy Tax Credits for Consumers | Department of Energy](#)
- [Do-It-Yourself Energy Savers Projects | Department of Energy](#)

Winter travel safety

- [Winter Weather Driving Tips: Prepare Your Vehicle | NHTSA.gov](#)
- [Winter Driving Tips | NHTSA.gov](#)

Winter safety

- [Winter Activity Safety Infographic | CPSC.gov](#)
- [USFA Winter Home Fire Statistics](#)
- [USFA Home Fire Prevention](#)

FEMA podcast

- [Before, During & After | FEMA.gov](#)

General preparedness videos/PSAs

- [FEMA ASL Accessible: Personal Preparedness: I use a Wheelchair](#)
- [FEMA ASL Accessible: Be Prepared When Disaster Strikes: What to Know if You Live with a Disability](#)
- [FEMA ASL Accessible: Be Prepared When Disaster Strikes: What to Know if You Live with a Disability \(Spanish captions\)](#)
- [FEMA ASL Accessible: Personal Disaster Preparedness: I am Blind \(short\)](#)
- [FEMA | Learn the Sounds of Safety](#)
- [FEMA | Fire Safety for Older Adults](#)
- [FEMA | Facts About Fire 2023 \(shorts from this video are available on YouTube\)](#)
- [FEMA | What to do during a blizzard](#)
- [FEMA | During and After a Winter Storm](#)
- [FEMA | How to Prepare for a Winter Storm](#)
- [CDC | Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning](#)
- [CDC | Safe Use of a Portable Generator Following Severe Weather](#)