

Winter Weather

Ready.gov · Source: FEMA

Cold injury, safe heating, and being cut off by snow and ice.

READ WITH CARE

FEMA last updated this page on 10 March 2026; we copied it on 30 September 2026. FEMA revises this guidance, so check the original for the current version, and in a real emergency follow instructions from local officials.

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Winter Weather

Winter storms create a higher risk of car accidents, hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, and heart attacks from overexertion. Winter storms including blizzards can bring extreme cold, freezing rain, snow, ice and high winds.

A winter storm can:

Last a few hours or several days.

Cut off heat, power and communication services.

Put older adults, children, sick individuals and pets at greater risk.

How to Protect Yourself from Winter Weather

IF YOU ARE UNDER A WINTER STORM WARNING, FIND SHELTER RIGHT AWAY

Know your winter weather terms:

Winter Storm Warning

Issued when hazardous winter weather in the form of heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or

heavy sleet is imminent or occurring. Winter Storm Warnings are usually issued 12 to 24 hours before the event is expected to begin.

Winter Storm Watch

Alerts the public to 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

Issued for accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and sleet which will cause significant inconveniences and, if caution is not exercised, could lead to life-threatening situations.

Know Your Risk for Winter Storms

Pay attention to weather reports and warnings of freezing weather and winter storms. Listen for emergency information and alerts. 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 your home to keep out the cold 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. Keep in mind each person's specific needs, including medication. Remember the needs of your pets. Have extra batteries for radios and flashlights. 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 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.

Stay Safe During Winter

Weather

Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Only use generators and grills outdoors and away from windows and never heat your home with a gas stovetop or oven. Using an oven or stovetop can also increase the risk of fires, burns and could damage the appliance.

- Stay off roads if at all possible. If trapped in your car, then stay inside.
- Limit your time outside. If you need to go outside, then wear layers of warm clothing. Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Reduce the risk of a heart attack by avoiding overexertion when shoveling snow and walking in the snow.

Learn the signs of, and basic treatments for, frostbite and hypothermia.

Frostbite causes loss of feeling and color around the face, fingers and toes.

- **Signs:** Numbness, white or grayish-yellow skin, firm or waxy skin.
- **Actions:** 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:** Shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech or drowsiness.
- **Actions:** Go to a warm room. Warm the center of the body first—chest, neck, head and groin. Keep dry and wrapped up in warm blankets, including the 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.

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The current version of this guidance is always at <https://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>.

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