

Winter Storms/ Extreme Cold

Allen County Public Health Preparations

The National Weather Service refers to winter storms as the “Deceptive Killers” because most deaths are indirectly related to the storm. Instead, people die in traffic accidents on icy roads and of hypothermia from prolonged exposure to cold. It is important to be prepared for winter weather and extreme cold before they strike.

Ongoing concerns about winter storms and extreme cold have led the U.S. government to work to improve overall preparation for them. One aspect of preparation is to learn what to do before, during, and after a winter storm and extreme cold in order to mitigate harm and damage.

This document focuses on common sense principles that will be useful in formulating plans to prepare for winter storms and extreme cold.

If a public health emergency happens in our community, Allen County Public Health will be the local agency responsible for preparing and guiding medical response and public information efforts. During such an emergency, a critical role of the Public Health Department will be to work with other local first responders, such as fire and police. The Public Health Department will also coordinate response activities with state and federal agencies.

Allen County Public Health is providing this information to help you understand what response you may be asked to take in the event of a winter storm.

What you should do before a winter storm hits

Before winter approaches, add the following supplies to your [emergency kit](#):

- Rock salt or more environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways. Visit the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) for a complete list of recommended products.
- Sand to improve traction.
- Snow shovels and other snow removal equipment.
- Sufficient heating fuel. You may become isolated in your home and regular fuel sources may be cut off. Store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Make a [Family Communications Plan](#). Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Be alert to changing weather conditions.
- Minimize travel. If travel is necessary, keep a disaster supplies kit in your vehicle.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

What you should do during a winter storm and extreme cold

- Stay indoors during the storm.
- Walk carefully on snowy, icy, walkways.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing

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loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.

- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion. If symptoms of hypothermia are detected, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first and give warm, non-alcoholic beverages if the victim is conscious. Get medical help as soon as possible.
- Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive: travel in the day; don't travel alone; keep others informed of your schedule; stay on main roads and avoid back road shortcuts.
- Let someone know your destination, your route, and when you expect to arrive. If your car gets stuck along the way, help can be sent along your predetermined route.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- Maintain ventilation when using kerosene heaters to avoid build-up of toxic fumes. Refuel kerosene heaters outside and keep them at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

Snow Conditions levels

Pay attention to the snow condition levels for safe driving on the roadways.

LEVEL 1 – ROADWAY ADVISORY: Allen County roadways are snow or ice covered with possible drifting. Driving conditions are hazardous. Extreme caution is advised.

LEVEL 2 – ROADWAY WARNING: All roadways in Allen County are extremely dangerous due to heavy, drifted or blowing snow. Some roads may become impassable causing danger to stranded drivers and occupants. Only motorists with extreme necessity and specialized equipment should attempt to drive in these unsafe conditions. In the interest of public safety, motorists are strongly advised to stay off roadways until conditions improve.

LEVEL 3 – STATE OF EMERGENCY: Extremely dangerous conditions exist. Travel should be limited to those persons with emergencies or extreme necessity. This level will be accompanied by a formal "State of Emergency" declaration by the Board of Allen County Commissioners.

What you should do after a winter storm and extreme cold

- Go to a designated public shelter if your home loses power or heat during periods of extreme cold. Text **SHELTER** + your ZIP code to **43362** (4FEMA) to find the nearest shelter in your area (example: **shelter 12345**).
- Continue to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in several layers. Stay indoors, if possible.

If you have any questions about winter storms or extreme cold please contact Allen County Public Health at 419-228-4457. Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can also visit www.allencountyhealthdepartment.org. For information about putting together an Emergency Preparation Plan, visit the FEMA site at www.ready.gov. Also, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.