

## **COLD WEATHER CAN BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH AND LIFE!**

With the onset of winter weather, all Illinoisans must take on additional responsibilities to prevent and protect themselves from the potential dangers that exist during this time of the season. Extreme cold temperatures, snow/ice storms, health problems and isolation are factors that pose a substantial danger during the winter months.

### **WINTER HEALTH TIPS:**

- ❄ **Influenza:** The "flu" is a contagious respiratory infection and its symptoms include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose and soreness and aching in the back, arms and legs. Typically, those who get the flu recover in a matter of days. However, for older persons who have a chronic health problem, the flu can result in serious complications, such as pneumonia. For these reasons, flu shots are recommended for all persons aged 65 years and older and for those who suffer from chronic health problems, such as heart disease, respiratory problems, renal disease, diabetes, anemia or any disease that weakens the body's immune system (consult your doctor before getting a flu shot on your own). In Illinois, the flu season usually begins in November and lasts until around the middle of April.
  
- ❄ **Frostbite:** The parts of the body most affected by frostbite are exposed areas of the face (cheeks, nose, chin and forehead), ears, wrists, hands and feet. Symptoms are loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance to the skin. To treat frostbite, warm the affected part of the body gradually. Wrap the frostbitten area in blankets, sweaters, coats, etc. If no warm wrappings are available, place frostbitten hands under the armpit or use your body to cover the affected area, then seek medical attention immediately. (**Caution: Do not rub the affected areas, serious damage to the tissue can occur.**)

❄️ **Hypothermia:** This is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to 95 degrees or less. Symptoms include slow or slurred speech, incoherence, memory loss, disorientation, uncontrollable shivering, drowsiness, repeated stumbling and apparent exhaustion. If these symptoms are detected, take the person's temperature. If below 95 degrees, immediately seek medical help. If medical help is not available, begin warming the person slowly. Always warm the trunk of the person's body first. **(Caution: Do not warm the person's extremities [arms and legs] first, because this drives the cold blood toward the heart and can lead to heart failure.)** If needed, use your own body heat to warm the person. Get the person into dry clothing, and wrap them in a warm blanket covering the head and neck.

Hypothermia usually develops over a period of time, anywhere from a few days to several weeks. Even mildly cool indoor temperatures of 60 degrees to 65 degrees can trigger hypothermia. Therefore, it is recommended that older persons **should not set their thermostats below 65 degrees** during the winter months.



## **WHAT TO DO DURING A WINTER STORM:**

Some common sense tips that should be taken to protect yourself from the cold, ice and snow during the winter months include the following:

- 1.** Listen to the radio or television for weather reports and emergency information regarding the latest winter storm watches, warnings and advisories.
- 2.** Dress for the season:
  - ❄️ Wear layers of loose-fitting, light weight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
  - ❄️ Mittens are warmer than gloves.

- \* Wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of a person's head.
  - \* Cover your mouth with scarves to protect lungs from the cold air.
  - \* Dress warmly even when indoors, eat enough food, and stay as active as possible.
- 3.** Avoid overexertion, such as shoveling heavy snow, pushing a car, or walking in deep snow. The strain from the cold and the hard labor could cause a heart attack. Sweating could lead to a chill and even hypothermia.
- 4.** When venturing outside, try to stay as dry as possible. Do not stay outside for extended periods! Also, be very careful when walking on icy and/or snow covered sidewalks and pavement. An accidental fall can cause broken bones, head injuries, muscle strains, pulls and tears which take a much longer time for older persons to recuperate.
- 5.** Travel only if necessary: During a winter storm ask yourself, "Is this trip really necessary?". If the trip cannot be delayed, call 1-800-452-4368 to get current road conditions. If possible, take another person with you. Also, tell someone at home (a friend, relative, or neighbor) that you are taking a trip, where you are going, the routes you will take and when you expect to arrive. When you reach your destination make a call to report your arrival. If your car breaks down during your trip, please do the following:
- \* If you have a cellular phone or CB radio, call for help.
  - \* Stay in your vehicle. Disorientation occurs quickly in wind-driven snow and cold.
  - \* Run the engine about ten minutes each hour for heat (after making sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked and opening windows a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning).
  - \* Make yourself visible to rescuers. Turn on the dome light at night when running your engine. Tie a colored cloth (preferably red) to your antenna or door. Raise the hood indicating trouble after snow stops falling.

- \* Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers, and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.
- 6.** If you are outside, away from your home and you get caught in a winter storm, please do the following:
- \* Seek shelter to stay dry.
  - \* Cover all exposed parts of the body.
  - \* If no shelter is nearby, prepare a lean-to, wind-break or snow cave for protection from the wind. Build a fire for heat and to attract attention.
  - \* Do not eat snow as it will lower your body temperature. Melt it first.
- 7.** When at home during a storm take the following precautions:
- \* Stay indoors. When using alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove, space heater, etc., use safeguards and ensure proper ventilation.
  - \* If you have no heat, close off unneeded rooms and place towels or rags under the doors. Cover windows at night. If this situation occurs, call relatives, friends, and/or neighbors. If you cannot get help, call one of the Aging Network organizations listed with this information.
  - \* We again want to reinforce that you wear layers of loose-fitting, light-weight warm clothing. Remove layers of clothing to avoid overheating, perspiration and subsequent chill.
  - \* If you are stranded at home during a winter storm and/or cold spell, please ask relatives, friends, and/or neighbors to look in on you once or twice a day. If this is not possible, either you and/or someone you know should contact the local Aging Network organizations listed with this information to get help.
  - \* Eat to supply heat and drink to avoid dehydration.

If you or anyone you know needs medical attention, call 911 or the local Police Department immediately.

The Illinois Department on Aging and local Area Agencies on Aging will be working hand-in-hand to assist older persons at risk and who need assistance. During winter weather emergencies, communities will be involved in door-to-door outreach and information and assistance will be available on an ongoing basis through the network of local agencies serving older persons, where you live.

For further information about local programs and services available to assist older persons, please call the following organizations:

**IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS TO CALL:**

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