

# County of Butler

## BOARD OF HEALTH

### Combined General Health District

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## Cold Weather Tips

**Carbon Monoxide Alert: Carbon monoxide poisoning can cause death. Before running your car, make sure your tail pipe is clear of snow and debris. In a small space (like a car), carbon monoxide gas can quickly build up and become dangerous.**

### Personal Safety

#### Clothing

- Wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Use things like thermal underwear, undershirts, track suits, sweaters, snowsuits, boots, hats, gloves, and scarves. Be sure that your outer layer is tightly woven and windproof.
- Wear wool – it is a popular material for cold because it will keep you warmer than cotton when damp or wet.
- Wear mittens over gloves – layering works for your hands as well.
- Wear a hat and cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs

#### Children

- Restrict infants' outdoor exposure when it is colder than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Dress children warmly and in bright colors. Set reasonable time limits on outdoor play.

#### Elderly

- Check on elderly family and neighbors. The elderly are particularly susceptible to cold-related illness.
- Ensure elderly family and neighbors have adequate heat and nutritious food.

#### Winter Activities & Sports

- Don't ski, ice skate, snowboard, or sled alone.
- Make sure kids are wearing helmets when they are skiing, sledding, snowboarding, and playing ice hockey. Parents should also wear helmets – remember, your children learn safety habits by watching you.
- Teach children to only sled on terrain that is free of obstacles. Make sure the bottom of the slope is far from streets and traffic. Always use a sled with a steering mechanism. Don't lie flat while sledding downhill. Don't overload a sled with children.
- Skate only in areas that have been approved for skating. Teach children to skate in the same direction as the crowd to avoid collision. Avoid darting across the ice and never skate alone.
- Enroll in at least one ski lesson. Use caution around lifts, control speed, and be aware of other skiers. Wear eye and sun protection. Ski helmets are recommended.

#### Spending Time Outdoors

- Don't stay out in the cold. If you have to stay out in the cold for work, be sure to take frequent breaks where it is warm.
- Avoid getting wet. Moisture can speed the onset of hypothermia and can be very dangerous. If you expect to get wet, keep a dry set of clothing nearby – especially a hat, gloves, socks, and boots.

- Drink non-caffeinated fluids. Dehydration occurs more quickly in cold, dry weather. Be sure to keep yourself well hydrated, especially if you are exerting yourself.

## **Frostbite & Hypothermia**

- Cover exposed skin and watch for frostbite. In extreme cold, frostbite can happen in under a minute. Wind only makes the risk greater – make sure to cover all exposed skin. The symptoms of frostbite 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 you or someone you know shows any of these symptoms, get in touch with a healthcare provider immediately. If symptoms are severe, call 9-1-1.
- If you suspect that a person is suffering from Hypothermia, don't give hot drinks or hot food; raise the legs or place hot water bottles on feet; do not place the person in a hot shower or bath; do not give any alcohol or drugs; do not massage the arms or legs.
- In an emergency, call a doctor, ambulance, rescue squad or local emergency room; handle the person very gently; protect the person from the cold with blankets, quilts, towels or extra clothes; ensure that the persons head and neck are covered.
- Don't drink alcohol. Alcohol can speed the onset and worsen the effects of hypothermia.

## **Physical Activity**

- Keep moving. Your body generates its own heat when you engage in physical activity. Moving will help keep you warm.
- Don't overexert yourself. Cold weather can exacerbate underlying respiratory illness. Be careful about exerting yourself in extreme cold.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack – a major cause of death in the winter. Be sure to stop shoveling if you have shortness of breath, heavy sweating, or any kind of pain. Avoid shoveling if you are elderly or have a heart condition.
- Stretch before going outside to shovel.
- Take frequent breaks from shoveling, even if only for a couple of minutes.
- Use a smaller shovel and make sure your shovel isn't bent, tilting, or damaged.

## **Pets**

- Keep pets indoors. Pets suffer in the cold just like humans, yet they have little means to protect themselves. Help your pets stay warm by keeping them indoors!

# **Home Safety**

## **Prepare**

- Create a [family emergency plan](#).
- Check to make sure that you have enough oil to get through the storm.

## **Smoke & Carbon Monoxide**

- Install and maintain smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home.
- Replace the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed or nauseous. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible gas produces whenever any fuel is burned, such as near oil or gas furnaces, water heaters, fireplaces, stoves, and some space heaters. It has no smell, taste, or color. It is a poison and is deadly.
- If the smoke or carbon monoxide detector sounds leave your home immediately and call 911.
- Carbon monoxide can result from snow-covered external vents. Major home appliances such as clothes dryer and furnace vent air and gases outside. Please make sure they are free of snow and debris.
- Start your snow blower in a well-ventilated area to avoid possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Don't run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open.
- Before running your car, make sure your tailpipe is clear of snow or debris.

## Heating

- Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- **NEVER** use your oven for heat.
- **NEVER** bring charcoal or gas grills indoors (they are a carbon monoxide hazard).
- Liquid or gas-fired portable space heaters are illegal in Massachusetts.
- Use electric space heaters with extreme care; avoid placing them near curtains or other flammable materials and turn them off before going to bed.
- Make sure all portable heat-producing appliances are unplugged when not in use (irons, hair devices, etc.).
- **NEVER** leave candles unattended.
- Keep dryer vents clear of snow and ice.

## Power Outages

- In case of a power outage, stock up on batteries, flashlights, and canned goods.
- If power is lost, unplug all appliances except one lamp to prevent power surge damage.
- Keep refrigerators closed as much as possible and keep temperature at 45° or below. Food will stay fresh for between 36-48 hours in a full fridge; 24 hours in a half-filled one.
- Keep a battery-operated radio, extra medicine, blankets, and bottled water on hand.

## Pipes

- Keep heat at adequate levels or leave faucets open with a slight drip to prevent pipes from freezing.
- Locate the main water shut off valve in your home and mark it for quick identification. Learn how to turn it off, and educate others in your household. If a water pipe bursts, shutting your home's main valve quickly will minimize flooding and property damage.
- Leave kitchen cabinet doors open if pipes are subject to freezing. This will allow heat to reach the pipes.
- Don't use an open flame to thaw pipes. If your pipes do freeze, use a hair dryer or rags soaked in hot water to thaw lines.
- Insulate pipes in unheated spaces like garages, basements, and crawl spaces. This will help prevent frozen pipes, avoiding property damage and the costs of repairs. Additionally, insulating hot water pipes will decrease your wait time for warm water.
- Protect your water meter from icy drafts and freezing temperatures. Most frozen meters are caused by drafts from an open basement door or window. Double check your property for drafts as the cold weather sets in. Seal openings in the basement foundation wall where cold air may enter. Stuff holes with insulation and fix broken window panes. A tiny opening may cause exposed pipe or the meter to freeze.

## Snow Blower Safety

- Always start your snow blower in a well-ventilated area to avoid possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you haven't used your snow blower in a while, remember that gasoline may still be inside from the last time you used it. Gasoline is only good for about 30 days, unless you've added a fuel stabilizer.
- Always make sure that the snow blower is completely turned off before replacing any parts.
- Fix clogs carefully. If your snow blower becomes clogged, turn it off, and remove the key before trying to clear it. Use a stick and NOT your hands to clear debris.
- If your snow blower hasn't been checked up by a professional in a while, have it serviced before you use it.

## Pedestrians

- Keep slippery driveways and sidewalks well-shoveled. Apply material for traction such as rock salt to avoid slips and falls. Businesses and owners are responsible for shoveling.

