



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
January 12, 2016

**CONTACT:** Amie M. Downs  
412-327-3700 cell  
[Amie.Downs@AlleghenyCounty.us](mailto:Amie.Downs@AlleghenyCounty.us)

## **County Prepares for Additional Winter Weather and Extreme Cold Weather**

**PITTSBURGH** – With a cold front expected to move across the region late this evening ushering in very cold and dry air, the Allegheny County Department of Public Works will have 22 trucks out this evening maintaining county roads, with the afternoon crew remaining through midnight. The focus of the crews will be on treating primary roads and bridges first, before shifting to secondary roads. Once temperatures fall below 20 degrees, crews will use liquid calcium with the salt on the roads. Supervisors are monitoring the weather and conditions, and will make adjustments to their schedules and routes as appropriate.

Drivers should expect to encounter slick roads and reduced visibility due to blowing snow, and should drive according to the conditions.

Although temperatures are likely to fall into the single digits tonight with sub-zero wind chills, the Department of Emergency Services has indicated that there are no plans to open warming centers at this time. In the event that there are power outages, or other circumstances that impact a number of residents, and a municipality opens a warming center, we will push that information out to the media and through the county's social media channels. The local emergency management coordinators in each municipality would make that decision.

With severe weather in the forecast, the Allegheny County Departments of Emergency Services, Human Services and Health offer the following tips and information on how to prepare for the extreme cold, deal with it once here, and what you can do afterward:

The [Department of Emergency Services](#), offers the following tips to prepare for the extreme cold:

- Make certain that you have an [emergency kit](#) which includes enough food, water, medicine and other supplies to last for at least 72 hours. Basic services such as electricity, gas, water, sewage treatment and telephones may also be affected. Your supplies kit should contain items to help you manage during such outages. Consider sufficient heating fuel if you have a secondary source of heat, and also ensure that you have adequate clothing and blankets to keep you warm.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone in your household knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk as more people turn to alternate heating sources. The primary hazards to avoid when using alternate sources for electricity, heating or cooking are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock and fire.
- Never use a generator, grill, camp stove or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace or any partially enclosed area. Locate unit away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors. At no time should a cooking stove or oven be used for heat. This can be a fire hazard as well as a source of deadly carbon monoxide.
- If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds, move quickly to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door. Call for help from the fresh air location and remain there until emergency personnel arrive to assist you. Don't have a carbon monoxide alarm? The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning

are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, call for help from a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door and remain there until emergency personnel arrives.

- If your pipes freeze, allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather. Running water, even at a trickle, will prevent freezing. As a precaution, you should also know how to shut off water valves in the event that a pipe bursts.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

### Dealing with the Extreme Cold

Stay indoors as much as possible. If you must go outside, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent. Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves. Wear a hat as you can lose as much as 50 percent of your body's heat through the head. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

If you are outdoors, watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia, the dangerous and sometimes fatal lowering of body temperatures. Frostbite includes loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion.

The wind chill index, which takes into account the combined effect of wind speed and air temperature, can be used to indicate the risk of frostbite to exposed skin. Frostbite can occur within 30 minutes at a wind chill temperature of -19, within ten minutes at -33 and within five minutes at -48. The [Allegheny County Health Department](#), recommends the following precautions:

- Cover as much skin as possible to guard against frostbite. The nose, cheeks, ears, fingers and toes are most vulnerable. Wind and precipitation raise the risk of frostbite.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages because they cause the body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages, broth or soup to maintain body temperature.
- To treat frostbite, cover the frozen area to protect it from further injury and provide extra clothing or blankets. Bring the victim indoors, if possible, and provide something warm and non-alcoholic to drink. Rewarm the frozen area by immersing it in warm, *not hot*, water. Call for emergency medical assistance.

Hypothermia, occurs when someone's body temperature drops below 95 degrees, It can occur indoors. If you can't maintain a house temperature of 70 degrees, dress warmly and use blankets and hats to keep warm, especially for infants, the elderly and the chronically ill.

If someone is suffering from hypothermia, bring the victim into a warm room. Remove wet or frozen clothing. Place the victim in warm blankets or a tub of warm, *not hot*, water. If the victim is conscious, give him non-alcoholic hot liquids. Call for emergency medical assistance.

The [Department of Human Services](#) encourages all county residents to check on older neighbors to make sure they are safe during periods of severe weather and offers the following tips and guidelines:

- Make sure seniors have a list of emergency telephone numbers that includes neighbors and family members who can help, if needed.
- Check to see if the furnace is working if the home feels cold. Become alert to dangerous methods of heating a room, such as open flames or ovens.
- Ensure that walkways and steps leading to their homes are cleared and that there is food and water in the house.
- Go back later or the next day, if at all possible, to make sure everything is still alright. Remove your coat and stay at least 15 minutes to determine if the home is warm enough. This is also a great chance to share a cup of coffee (decaffeinated, of course), verify the pipes are not frozen, and check on pets.

- Be particularly mindful of older neighbors during a power outage. Lack of electrical power not only presents dangers associated with lack of heat, but also risks associated with non-functioning vital medical equipment, such as oxygen systems, emergency lighting, stair glides and medication timers. If you cannot contact someone you believe is in the house, contact your local police or emergency services.

When weather circumstances dictate, the [Area Agency on Aging](#) and its contracted providers contact frail, isolated and high-risk consumers who are registered for care management. Care managers visit those at highest risk and ensure each home is well-heated and has enough food, water and medication to last for several days. Care managers also respond to emergency needs as they arise.

The Area Agency on Aging has already provided about 1,400 “Snowy Weather Boxes” to at-risk older adults who are registered with the agency and often live alone. The boxes include toilet paper, non-skid slipper socks, hand sanitizer, flashlight and batteries, peanut butter, crackers, tuna, fruit juice, bottled water, and other shelf-stable meals and drinks.

Additionally, the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES), located at Smithfield United Church of Christ, 620 Smithfield Street, will be open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. to provide temporary, overnight accommodations, professional social services, medical care, and protection from frigid temperatures. The SWES is available any night that the temperature drops to 25 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

#### After Extreme Cold

If your home loses power or heat during periods of extreme cold, public shelters are typically opened and information on such openings will be provided online, and through the media.

Continue to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing in several layers. Stay indoors, if possible.

Conserve fuel, if necessary, by keeping your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.

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 are most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was mostly likely to penetrate).

List to a NOAA Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Services and other resources. Be alert to changing weather conditions.

#### For More Information

In an emergency, call 9-1-1 immediately from any wired or wireless phone. An emergency is any situation which requires immediate assistance from the police, fire department or medical professionals. If you're not sure whether the situation is a true emergency, call 9-1-1 and the call-taker will determine whether you need emergency help.

While extreme cold weather cannot be controlled, we can all be prepared by taking action in advance to protect ourselves and our families. Be informed. Make a plan. Build a kit. Get involved. Those are the four fundamental steps to being prepared if an emergency occurs. For more information, visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Cold weather health tips may be obtained by calling the Allegheny County Health Department at 412-687-ACHD (2243) or visiting its website at [www.achd.net](http://www.achd.net).

Information about programs and services for older adults is available calling the SeniorLine at 412-350-5460 (TDD/TTY 412-350-2727), sending an email to [SeniorLine@AlleghenyCounty.us](mailto:SeniorLine@AlleghenyCounty.us) or by visiting the DHS Older Adults website at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/olderadults.aspx](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/olderadults.aspx).

###

#### **OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

101 COURTHOUSE • 436 GRANT STREET • PITTSBURGH, PA 15219  
PHONE (412) 350-6500 • FAX (412) 350-6512

