



For more information contact: Tod Pritchard, Office: (608) 242-3324 Cell:(608) 219-4008
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Weather “Triple Whammy” ready to strike
State agencies team up to warn residents of dangerous cold and snow

(MADISON) – Wisconsin residents need to be ready for three major winter weather events impacting the state over the next week. Wind, snow and cold will create dangerous conditions starting Friday, continuing through Wednesday.

Unfortunately there have already been four probable cold weather-related deaths in Wisconsin this year (one each in Ashland, Milwaukee, Marquette and Barron counties). ReadyWisconsin along with the Departments of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and Health Services (DHS) are teaming up to warn people about the upcoming bitter weather and precautions you and your family should take to keep safe.

Forecast – The National Weather Service says travel will be difficult Friday afternoon and evening as a front moves through the state. Winds of 20-30 mph gusting to 40 mph in southeast Wisconsin will combine with light snow and existing powdery snow already on the ground to create slick roads and limited visibility. More snow is expected in Wisconsin Saturday and Sunday with 4 to 5 inches possible. Another arctic blast follows with dangerous wind chills beginning Sunday night into Monday and continuing through Wednesday. Meteorologists are predicting lows Monday night into Tuesday morning of -15 to -30 with wind chills at -30 to -50.

Health Risks – With these bitter temperatures, beware of hypothermia and frostbite.

Frostbite can occur on exposed skin in less than 10 minutes. Symptoms include a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, ear tips and tip of the nose. Limit your time outside. If you see these signs, seek medical care immediately!

Signs of hypothermia include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness in adults and children. In infants, symptoms can include bright red or cold skin and very low energy. If you notice anyone exhibiting any of the symptoms of hypothermia, seek medical care immediately!

If you must work outside wear proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions. If possible, use the buddy system; work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs. Drink warm, sweet beverages (sugar water, sports-type drinks) and avoid drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, sodas or hot chocolate) and alcohol. Remember, people face increased risks when they take certain medications, are in poor physical condition, or suffer from illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, or cardiovascular disease.

Carbon Monoxide Danger - Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the United States. Breathing carbon monoxide displaces the oxygen in the blood and can cause death within minutes at high levels. Symptoms of overexposure to carbon monoxide are often mistaken for the flu and include headaches, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath/chest pain, nausea/vomiting, and confusion. If you or someone you know experience any of these symptoms, or your carbon monoxide detector sounds an alarm, seek shelter elsewhere immediately and call 911.

“No doubt furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves, and other home heating devices will be working overtime during these extremely cold temperatures and that can increase the risk for carbon monoxide poisoning,” said Karen McKeown, State Health Officer.

Never run a gasoline or propane heater or a grill (gas or charcoal) inside your home or an unventilated garage. Any heating system that burns fuel will produce carbon monoxide. Never run a car in an enclosed space. If a vehicle is running, you must have a door open to the outside. Generators should be run a safe distance from the home. Never run a generator in the home or garage, or right next to windows or doors. Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector.

Warming sites are available for those seeking relief from the extreme cold. For a complete list of centers go to: <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov>.

Pet Precautions - While our pets might seem to have built-in, warm winter coats, they too are sensitive to the elements. It is recommended to bring them indoors during this bitter weather. Dogs and cats can get frost bitten ears, nose and feet if left outside during bitter cold weather. Chemicals used to melt snow and ice can also irritate pets' paws - be sure to keep anti-freeze, salt and other poisons away from pets.

Cats sometimes crawl under cars and into the engine compartment, seeking shelter and warmth. Bang on the hood before starting the car on cold days to startle sleeping animals. And remember, just as cars heat to oven temperature in summer, they can be equally deadly in winter when they turn into freezers. Don't leave your pet alone in a vehicle. It may freeze to death.

Livestock Precautions - Animals can suffer from hypothermia, frostbite and other cold weather injuries. Harsh conditions weaken their immune systems and open the door to illness. Calves and swine are especially susceptible to cold. Make sure animals have a place to get out of the wind, even if it is just a windbreak or a three-sided shelter. Also provide dry bedding to protect them from frostbite. Animals also burn extra calories to keep warm in severe cold. They also need access to fresh water – not frozen streams or snow. Stock tank heaters and frost-proof watering devices will ensure that livestock get enough to drink.

“Livestock owners need to provide extra nutrition, plenty of good bedding, and protection from winds and moisture,” says state humane veterinarian Dr. Yvonne Bellay. “Calves often have undetected pneumonia that kills quickly when the temperature drops. Be particularly careful with animals that have recently been brought here from a warmer climate or that have been indoors and are now outdoors. If they're not acclimated, they'll suffer more winter illness.”

On the road - If you are traveling make sure you have a winter emergency kit in your vehicle. Items to include in the kit are candles and matches, a flashlight, pocket knife, snacks, a cell phone adapter, a blanket and extra clothing. Call 511 or go to www.511wi.gov for the latest Wisconsin road conditions before traveling especially on Friday.

For additional information go to:

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov>

<http://datcp.wi.gov/>

<http://readywisconsin.wi.gov>