

November is Winter Weather Awareness Month

Last winter's Polar Vortex brought seemingly endless days of below-zero temperatures, icy winds, and abundant snow, which resulted in at least 22 cold weather-related deaths across Missouri, according to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Service. The severe weather caused fatal car accidents and, in some cases, health hazards to those shoveling snow.

Last winter's Polar Vortex caused at least 22 cold-related deaths in Missouri.

The month of November is dedicated to preparing St. Louis area residents for winter weather hazards to help make this winter safer. The All Ready STL Campaign suggests that all St. Louis area residents take a few basic steps to be winter weather ready: 1) Make a plan, 2) Prepare a kit, and 3) Be informed. Everyone should take a few extra steps to be ready for winter weather.

Plan to be confined to your home for several days, possibly without electricity.

- Stock an extra supply of food that does not need to be cooked. This is particularly important for those individuals that rely on home-delivered meals as these deliveries may be suspended during a severe winter storm or other emergency.
- Have supplies that meet the needs of you family. For infants, you may need extra formula or diapers. If a family member takes a special medication, make a plan with your doctor to make sure you have a sufficient supply on-hand.
- If you use fuel to heat your home, check your supply before the storm hits. If roads are closed, suppliers may not be able to reach your home.
- Have a plan for when the power goes out. If you rely on medical equipment that requires electric power, identify workarounds or work with your medical providers to secure backup sources of power. Your power company may also have options for power restoration if you use certain types of medical equipment. If you use a portable generator for power, follow the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation.
- If you have pets or a service animal, plan for their needs, including food, comfort, and sanitation.

Make sure you have the right supplies on-hand before severe weather arrives. This may include:

- Rock salt or other similar products to melt ice on walkways.
- Sand to improve traction for your vehicle or wheelchair tires.
- Snow shovels and / or other snow removal equipment.
- Adequate clothing and blankets to keep you and your family warm.

Account for all members of the family, including individuals with disabilities or others with access and functional needs.

- If you receive home-based care (e.g., home care attendant, home health aide, visiting nurse service), include caregivers in developing your plan and familiarize yourself with your home care agency's emergency plan.
- If you receive dialysis or other medical treatments, find out your provider's emergency plan, including where your back-up site is located. Talk about transportation options with your service provider.
- If you use oxygen, talk to your vendor about emergency replacements and options for additional supply.
- Find out if your jurisdiction has a medical or social needs registry. These may help first responders know that you have a disability or other access and functional need in case of an emergency.

During a Storm:

Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. Use caution, take breaks, push the snow instead of lifting it when possible, and lift lighter loads.

Beware of frostbite, especially if you must be outside. Symptoms include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities. Cover exposed skin, but do not rub the affected area in an attempt to warm it up. Seek medical help immediately.

If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation 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.

During severe winter weather, stay at home if you can. **Drive only if it is absolutely necessary.** If you must drive, travel during daylight hours and try not to travel alone. Keep others informed of your schedule and stay on main roads. Additional safe travel tips include:

- Dress for the conditions when outdoors. Wear several layers of lightweight, warm clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven, waterproof, and hooded to keep you warm and dry.
- Winterize your car before winter weather arrives. Have your ignition, fuel, and cooling systems checked along with your battery, lights, brakes, wipers, defroster, oil, and exhaust. Your tires are important and should also be checked out.
- If you travel during winter, carry a winter storm kit in your vehicle. It should include a flashlight, windshield scraper, paper towels, extra warm clothes, booster cables, sand, chains, blankets, and high-calorie non-perishable food.

Learn more at http://www.state.il.us/iema/disaster/pdf/iema333_winter_storm_preparedness_guidebook.pdf.