



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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For Immediate Release

Stay Safe and Healthy During Winter

The winter season has arrived and with it comes winter storms and cold temperatures, which can create hazardous conditions. The Plainville-Southington Regional Health District advises that if you plan ahead, you can stay safe and healthy by being prepared for the rigors of the season.

Respect Winter Storm Dangers

When the snow falls, people need to get out either for work, school, or recreation. Snow shoveling is an activity that many cannot or will not avoid. Shoveling is strenuous exercise, and with extreme cold weather it can increase blood pressure, accelerate the heart rate and create internal body conditions that restrict blood flow to the heart. All these factors increase the risk of heart attack. As many as 1,200 heart-related deaths occur yearly during and after major snowstorms. People with any type of heart condition should avoid shoveling.

To minimize the dangers of snow shoveling:

- Exercise regularly and keep yourself in shape all year to be ready for vigorous winter activity.
- Dress warmly when going outside so as not to expend energy keeping warm, and wear layers so some can be removed to avoid overheating. Invest in the best pair of gloves you can afford.
- Take breaks, and pay attention to how your body feels during those breaks. If you are getting out of breath, slow your pace and rest. If tired, stop shoveling.
- Shovel with a smaller rather than larger shovel – lifting less weight will put less strain on your heart. Use your legs, not your back, and push the snow as far as possible before lifting it.
- If you experience chest pain or upper body pain that doesn't go away or keeps coming back, call 911.

Avoid broken bones by being careful when walking in the snow. Wear padded gloves, jackets and hats to help cushion falls. Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches.

Be aware of hypothermia and frostbite dangers. Hypothermia is abnormally low body temperature that occurs when your body loses more heat than it can produce, and eventually the stored energy in your body is used up. This affects the brain causing the victim not to think clearly or move well. Early symptoms include shivering, fatigue, loss of coordination, disorientation and confusion.

Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing parts of the body. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in the affected areas. Symptoms include reduced blood flow to hand and feet, numbness, tingling or stinging, aching; and bluish or pale, waxy skin. If you or someone you're with is experiencing symptoms

of hypothermia or frostbite, seek warming treatment immediately, preferably at a hospital emergency room.

Your home and cars need to be prepared for cold temperatures, snow and ice. Winterize your home by checking and installing weather stripping and insulation, clean out your gutters, and repair roof leaks. Check that your heating systems are clean, working properly, and ventilated to the outside. Inspect fire places and chimneys. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and check them monthly. And be prepared for power outages.

Prepare your car for winter. Service your radiator, check antifreeze level, and make sure your tires are suitable for winter weather. Keep your gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines. Use wintertime formula for your windshield washer. Keep a winter emergency kit in your car and learn safety rules in case you become stranded in your car.

Above all, be prepared to check on family and neighbors who are especially at risk from cold weather hazards: young children, older adults, and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside or provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

For more information on staying safe and healthy in winter, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/WinterWeather/index.html>. For more information of snow shoveling and heart dangers presented in this article, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency at http://m.fema.gov/wi_during.htm.