

MEDIA RELEASE

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Health Department Provides Tips on Staying Safe and Healthy in the Cold

Snow and very cold weather are predicted in Pierce County this week. Cold temperatures and wind can lead rapidly to life-threatening hypothermia. Hypothermia is a condition of abnormally low body temperature, and it occurs when your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Shivering is the first sign of hypothermia. As hypothermia progresses, symptoms include lack of coordination, slurred speech, confusion and drowsiness. If you notice a person with any of these symptoms, immediately get them out of the elements and call for help.

The Pierce County Health Department advises residents to take some precautions to protect their health and safety:

Outdoors:

- Stay inside as much as possible. If you must go outside, dress warmly in dry, windproof clothing. Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat. Fasten buttons or zippers and tighten drawstrings securely. Don't forget gloves, mittens, and a hat that covers the ears. Go back inside if you start shivering.
- Older adults are especially susceptible to hypothermia and frostbite. Watch out for your elderly neighbors and family members.
- Stock a home emergency kit. Your home kit should include items such as food and water, cell phone and charger, flashlight and batteries, first aid kit, important medications, a weather radio, and a change of clothes. Visit readywisconsin.wi.gov/make-a-kit for more items and tips.
- Before you drive, check to be sure that your vehicle's tailpipe is clear of snow. If the tailpipe is blocked, carbon monoxide can build up inside your vehicle.
- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack - a major cause of death in the winter.

Our mission is to assure the health of the public, prevent disease and injury, promote health behaviors, and protect against environmental hazards.

Indoors:

- If you use a heating source such as a fireplace or wood stove, be sure to have adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up in your home. Keep children away from all heaters to avoid accidental burns.
- Be cautious when using space heaters, which can be a fire hazard. Turn them off when you go to bed or leave the room.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.

If you are experiencing a heating crisis and need assistance, please call Pierce County Human Services at 715-273-6788.

A warm shelter is available in River Falls. The Hoffman Park Storm Shelter (near the baseball stadium in Hoffman Park) is available for 24/7 usage beginning Monday, Jan. 28 at 3 p.m. and continuing through noon on Friday.

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