



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Department on Aging Warns Seniors to Prepare Homes and Get Flu Shots in Preparation for Winter

Find how to “Keep Warm” at 1-877-411-WARM or www.keepwarm.illinois.gov

SPRINGFIELD – To prepare for this year’s cold winter weather, Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson today urged older people and their families to recognize that winter poses a special threat to seniors. Topping the winter “to do” list should be to get a flu shot to protect against the flu, formally called influenza. The flu season usually runs from November until April.

“People 50 and older are considered most at risk, and an annual flu shot is strongly recommended,” said IDoA Director Johnson. “I hope that older people and those who care for them will take practical moves now in anticipation of the cold weather ahead. “We’re recommending tips for preparing your home, as well as preventative health care.”



Older people are advised to set their thermostats to above 65 degrees. Seniors who lower the thermostat to reduce heating bills risk developing hypothermia, a potentially fatal condition in which the body temperature drops dangerously low. At increased risk are older people who take certain medications, drink alcohol, lack proper nutrition, and who have conditions such as arthritis, stroke, Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s disease.

It’s important to have the furnace checked to be sure that it is in good shape and heating ducts are properly ventilated. Proper ventilation is also a concern if you use alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove or space heater. If you use heating oil, be sure that you have enough heating oil.

Governor Rod R. Blagojevich’s annual Keep Warm campaign helps seniors having difficulty paying their heating bills. Seniors, disabled individuals and families with small children are encouraged to apply for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program or LIHEAP. A network of 35 Local Community Action Agencies around the state is currently accepting applications. For a complete listing of LIHEAP’s local community action agencies and additional information about the grant program, go to www.liheapillinois.com, or call the toll-free Keep Warm Illinois hotline at **1-877-411-WARM**.

(more)

In preparation for cold weather, seniors are encouraged to:

- Dress in layers, both indoors and outdoors.
- Keep active. Make a list of exercises and activities to do indoors when you can't get out.
- Eat well and drink 10 glasses of water every day; Stock up on extra non-perishable food supplies, just in case.
- Keep extra medications in the house. If this is not possible, make arrangements now to have your medications delivered.
- Have your house winterized. Be sure that walls and attics are insulated. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows. Insulate pipes near outer walls, in crawl spaces and attics that are susceptible to freezing.
- Make sure you and your family knows how to shut off the water supply in case pipes burst.
- Prepare your vehicle for winter. Check wipers, tires, lights and fluid levels regularly. Keep a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal. Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season. Plan long trips carefully and travel by daylight with at least one other person.
- Protect against fire. If you don't have a fire extinguisher, buy one. Make sure space heaters are at least three feet from anything flammable. Do not overload extension cords.
- Do not shovel snow or walk in deep snow. Plan now for someone else to shovel the snow. The strain from the cold and hard labor could cause a heart attack; sweating can lead to a chill and even hypothermia.

For more information about program services to assist older adults in Illinois and their caregivers, call the Department on Aging Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966 or for TTY (hearing impaired use only) call 1-888-206-1327.

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