



PRESS RELEASE

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Department on Aging Urges Seniors to Take Steps to Stay Safe and Warm This Winter

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

SPRINGFIELD – December 15, 2010. As the mercury dips, Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson reminds older persons they are at a higher risk to falling ill during these cold days.

“The cold winter months pose a risk to older adults. It’s best for older people and their families to be prepared in order to stay safe and warm,” said Director Johnson. “Make sure your house is equipped to deal with the cold, stock up on necessities and take special attention to your health.”

Seniors should make sure they set their thermostats above 65 degrees. People 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 and Parkinson’s disease.

In addition to winterizing the home, people ages 50 and older are urged to get an annual flu shot, since they are considered at risk for seasonal flu. This year, the seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccinations are available as a single dose.

Seniors should get their furnace checked each year to make sure it’s working properly. The state has resources available so seniors aren’t left to make difficult decisions like, whether to pay their heating bills or take their prescription medications this winter. For more information on how to *Keep Warm*, call 1-877-411-WARM or log on to www.keepwarm.illinois.gov.

In dealing with 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 & keep hydrated; Stock up on extra non-perishable food supplies, just in case.
- Keep extra medications in the house. If this is not possible, make arrangements to them delivered.
- Have your house winterized. Be sure walls and attics are insulated. Caulk/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 by checking 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 winter. Plan long trips carefully. Arrange to travel by daylight and 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. Arrange for someone else to shovel snow. The strain from the cold and hard labor could cause a heart attack; sweating can lead to chills and 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.