



PRESS RELEASE

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[in advance of first day of winter]

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Dept on Aging Offers Tips to Help Seniors Prepare For Winter

*Seniors Urged to Get Flu Shots & Get Homes Ready;
More Tips at www.keepwarm.illinois.gov*

SPRINGFIELD - December 21, 2011. To mark the first official day of winter, Illinois Department on Aging Director John K. Holton, Ph.D., reminded older adults and their families to get ready for the cold weather. Some to do items include things to protect their homes and their health like having the furnace checked and getting a flu shot.

“The mercury is already dropping, but it’s not too late to get ready,” said Director Holton. “The flu season runs through April, so a flu shot is strongly recommended for people ages 50 years and older, who are considered to be at risk for influenza. And there are some practical tips for older adults, their families and caregivers who care for them to help prepare in anticipation of the cold weather ahead.”

Seniors should make sure they set their thermostats above 65 degrees. Older persons are more susceptible to fall ill during the cold winter months. People who lower the thermostat to reduce heating bills risk developing hypothermia, a potentially fatal condition in which the body temperature drops dangerously low. Also at an 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 when using alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove or space heater. If you use heating oil, be sure that you have enough heating oil.

The state has a website that offers information about how to battle winter in Illinois and about available resources 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 preparation for cold weather, the following are some tips that seniors are encouraged to do:

- 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 daily; Stock up on 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.

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- 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.

A few more tips to keep you safe and self-reliant in case of power failure:

- If you have a gas stove and it has an electronic ignition, check to see if you can light the top burners should your power go out. (If you have an older stove, you may even be able to use your oven.)
- **DO NOT** under any circumstances use your oven to heat your home. Carbon monoxide can build up and can kill you and everyone in your home.
- If you have an electric stove, make sure you have food that can be prepared without cooking.
- For telephone use - always have a corded phone available. Cordless phones do not work without power.
- Have a battery operated radio (weather radio is best) so you can listen to updates on weather conditions or receive instructions on what to do to keep safe, or if necessary receive information on evacuating.

For more information about programs and 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. Also see the publication, [Weathering Winter \(PDF\)](#), from the Illinois Department of Public Health.