



Lexington Fayette County Health Department

650 Newtown Pike
Lexington, Kentucky 40508-1197
(859) 252-2371
(859) 288-2359 Fax
(859) 288-7510 Medical Fax

Jan. 7, 2010
11 a.m.

Media Contact:
Kevin Hall
(859) 288-2384
KevinS.Hall@ky.gov

Health Department offers safety tips as temperature dips

As winter weather heads toward the Bluegrass, the Lexington-Fayette County Health Department asks residents to use caution when dealing with the cold temperatures.

Before inclement weather hits, residents should prepare an emergency supplies list, including items such as a flashlight, a battery-powered radio, extra batteries, a snow shovel, blankets and matches. Food that needs no cooking or refrigeration, such as bread, crackers, cereal, canned foods and dried fruits, should be purchased. Store water in clean containers or buy bottled water in case water pipes freeze and rupture. Also, make sure to have a supply of any medications that family members might need.

During severe weather, stay indoors whenever possible. However, if you must go outside, dress warmly in layered clothing, including a hat, a scarf or knit mask to cover your face and mouth, sleeves that are snug at the wrist, mittens, a water-resistant coat and water-resistant boots. Avoid exertion, as cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. People with heart disease or high blood pressure should follow their doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other activities in the snow. When outside, avoid walking on ice, and keep your steps and walkways as free of ice as possible.

Be on the lookout for signs of hypothermia and frostbite, two common cold weather-related health problems. Warning signs of hypothermia, which is abnormally low body temperature, include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness. If you detect symptoms of hypothermia, seek medical care immediately. Get the victim into a warm room and remove any wet clothing. Warm the center of the body first with an electric blanket, if available. Otherwise, use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothes, towels or sheets. Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not use alcoholic beverages.

Warning signs for frostbite, or an injury to the body caused by freezing, include redness or pain in any skin area, white or grayish-yellow skin, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy and numbness. If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care immediately. Get the victim into a warm room, and immerse the affected area in warm – not hot – water. Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it, as this can cause more damage. Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp or the heat of a stove, fireplace or radiator for warming, as the frostbitten areas are numb and can be easily burned.

These procedures are not substitutes for medical care, and all emergencies should be reported to a physician or health care provider.

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