WINTER SAFETY GUIDE

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CCHD
Clinton County HEALTH Department
Winter in the North County is known for its unpredictable weather patterns and frigid temperatures—but beneath its icy exterior, there is so much more to enjoy! Being prepared for the flu, winter storms and extreme temperatures can make for smooth sailing all the way to spring. Use this guide as a resource to stay healthy, warm, safe and prepared all winter long. We cover flu, home heating safety, snow removal, slip and fall prevention, travel safety, frostbite, hypothermia, the outdoors and more.

**STAYING WELL**

Germs are everywhere! They get onto your hands and items you touch throughout the day. Germs can get into your body through your eyes, nose and mouth and make you sick. Studies have shown that handwashing can prevent 1 in 3 diarrhea-related sicknesses and 1 in 5 respiratory infections, such as a cold or flu.

Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds, at key times, and with soap and water is one of the most important steps you can take to get rid of germs and avoid spreading them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

**Other good health habits**

*Avoid close contact* with sick people.

*Stay home when you're sick.* If you or your child gets sick, stay at home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine (e.g., Tylenol or ibuprofen).

*Cover your mouth and nose* with a tissue (or your elbow) when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away after use.

*Avoid touching* your eyes, nose or mouth.

*Routinely clean and disinfect* frequently touched surfaces and objects at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill (e.g., doorknobs, keyboards, phones).

*Practice all good health habits.* Stay smoke-free, eat nutritious foods, drink plenty of fluids, stay active, manage stress, and get enough sleep.

For more information visit: [www.cdc.gov/handwashing](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing).
Commonly known as flu, influenza is a respiratory illness caused by viruses. Flu is spread from person-to-person by coughing, sneezing, or close contact with someone who is sick. Flu strikes suddenly and can last several days. A person who is infected with flu may go to work or school feeling well in the morning and by afternoon feel very ill. Flu season typically lasts from October to May.

**Flu symptoms vary by age but can include:**

- fever* or chills
- cough
- sore throat
- headache
- muscle aches
- runny or stuffy nose
- fatigue
- vomiting or diarrhea**

*Not everyone with the flu has a fever.

**More common in children than adults.

For more information visit: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).

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**What’s the best way to prevent seasonal flu?**

**Get vaccinated every year!**

- Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- Flu vaccines are updated yearly to better match circulating viruses.
- After getting the flu vaccine, it takes about 2 weeks for your body to develop antibodies that will protect you from flu.
- A flu vaccination does not guarantee protection against flu. Some people who get vaccinated might still get sick. However, people who get a flu vaccine are less likely to get sick with the flu or be hospitalized from flu than someone who does not get vaccinated.
- Don’t like shots? The nasal spray flu vaccine is an option for people aged 2-49 years who are otherwise healthy and not pregnant.

**Experiencing Flu Symptoms?**

**Ask you healthcare provider about antivirals.**

- Antivirals fight against the flu virus in your body.
- They are different from antibiotics, which fight against bacterial infections.
- They are not a substitute for getting a flu vaccine.
- They are not available over the counter—you can only get them with a prescription from your healthcare provider.
- Antivirals work best when started within two days of getting symptoms. They can lessen flu symptoms, shorten the time you are sick and prevent serious flu complications.

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**Antibiotics**

Antibiotics are only needed for treating infections caused by bacteria, but even some bacterial infections get better without antibiotics. They are not needed for many sinus infections and some ear infections.

They do not work on viruses, such as those that cause colds, flu, bronchitis, or runny noses (even if the mucus is thick, yellow, or green). They will not make you feel better if you have a virus. Respiratory viruses (such as a cold) usually go away in a week or two without treatment. Ask your healthcare provider about the best way to feel better while your body fights off the virus.

Antibiotics will not help you when they aren’t needed, and the side effects could cause harm. Side effects range from minor to very severe health problems. When you need antibiotics for a bacterial infection, the benefits usually outweigh the risk of side effects.

They can lead to antibiotic resistance, which occurs when bacteria develop the ability to defeat the drugs designed to kill them.

Antibiotics should be taken exactly as prescribed. Talk with your doctor if you have any questions.
HOME SAFETY

Many people prefer to stay indoors during the winter months, but even inside, safety is not guaranteed. Listen to weather forecasts regularly and take steps to prepare your home for cold weather, winter storms and power outages.

Prepare before a storm

Sign up for local alerts and warning systems.
Store water in clean containers.
Fully charge your cell phone.
Make an emergency supply kit. You should have enough supplies to sustain yourself, your family and your pets for at least 3 days.
Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration.
Talk to your medical provider about a power outage plan for medical devices powered by electricity (such as oxygen concentrators) and refrigerated medicines. Find out how long medication can be stored at higher temperatures.

Weatherproof your home.

Act during a storm

Monitor the weather reports.
Turn off or disconnect unneeded appliances, equipment, or electronics. Keep freezers and refrigerators closed.

Check on family and neighbors who may be at a higher risk from cold weather hazards (especially young children and older adults).

If you have pets, bring them inside. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

Throw away any food that has been exposed to temperatures 40°F or higher for 2 hours or more, or that has an unusual odor, texture, or color. Never taste foods to decide if they are safe.

When in doubt, throw it out!

If the power has been out for less than 4 hours, eat food in the order it will spoil:

1. Eat the food in the refrigerator.
2. Eat food from the freezer.
3. Start eating food from your emergency supply.

For more information visit

www.ready.gov/winter-weather.
Carbon monoxide (CO)

Often called the “invisible killer,” CO is an odorless, colorless gas created when fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil, and methane) burn incompletely. In the home, heating and cooking equipment that burn fuel are also potential sources of CO. During and after a snowstorm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove, and fireplace are clear of snow build-up.

Vehicles or generators running in an attached garage can also produce dangerous levels of CO. Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if garage doors are open. If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting it. Make sure the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle is not covered with snow.

CO poisoning can cause serious health issues and even result in death. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

Smoke and CO alarms

Smoke and CO alarms that are properly installed and maintained play a vital role in reducing deaths and injuries. However, it is important to know that many children will not wake when an alarm sounds. Be sure your family has a plan in place.

Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of the house and in every bedroom, outside all sleeping areas, in a family room or den and at the bottom of each staircase. They should be mounted on a ceiling or high on the wall.

CO alarms should be installed in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home and in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes or standards.

For added protection, interconnect all smoke and CO alarms. When one alarm sounds they all sound. Interconnection can be done using hard-wiring or wireless technology.

Test batteries in alarms monthly and replace batteries every 6 months. Replace alarms according to manufacturers’ recommendations. This is generally at least every 10 years.

Heat your home safely

If you’ll be using a fireplace, wood stove, or kerosene heater, install smoke and CO detectors near the area to be heated. Vent all fuel-burning equipment outside. Use only the type of fuel designed for your heater. Do not store gasoline indoors—the fumes could ignite.

Space heaters should never be placed within 3 feet of anything that may catch on fire (e.g., curtains, furniture, or bedding), on top of furniture, or near water. Never cover your space heater or leave children unattended near it. Do not use your space heater if it has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks. Never use your stove or oven as a heating source.

If using a generator, camp stove or grill, make sure it is located outside and at least 20 feet from your home. A generator should also not be located anywhere it could be reached by snow or rain—do not use a generator if it is wet! Use a single, heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord to plug into your generator.

For more information visit www.nfpa.org.
EXTREME TEMPERATURES

In cold temperatures, your body loses heat faster than it can be made. This can lead to serious health problems, including hypothermia and frostbite. When the weather is extremely cold, try to stay indoors. If you must go outside, protect yourself by dressing properly and being aware of the signs and symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is an abnormally low body temperature. It typically occurs at very cold temperatures, but can happen at higher temperatures if a person is wet (from rain, sweat or cold water) and becomes chilled. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia very dangerous, because a person may not know that it’s happening and won’t be able to do anything about it.

Frostbite

Frostbite occurs when skin is exposed to extreme cold for too long. It causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. The nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes are most often affected. A victim is often unaware of frostbite because frozen tissue is numb. Frostbite happens in three stages—mild, superficial and deep.

Prevent frostbite by covering body parts most often affected in warm dry clothing when going outside in cold temperatures. If you have to go outside be sure to wear: a hat; a scarf or knit mask that covers your face and mouth; water-resistant coat and boots; mittens or gloves; and several layers of loose-fitting clothing.

If a person is experiencing signs or symptoms of hypothermia or frostbite, or if their body temperature is below 95°F, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Get them into a warm room or shelter. Remove any wet clothing. Warm them under dry layers of blankets and clothing. Place areas affected by frostbite in warm-to-touch water.

Use caution when treating frostbite. Since skin may be numb, victims of frostbite can do more harm to damaged tissues.

At risk groups in cold weather:

Older adults without proper food, clothing, or heating.
People who stay outdoors for long periods of time (homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.).
People who drink alcohol in excess or use illicit drugs.
Babies sleeping in cold rooms.


Hypothermia Signs & Symptoms:
- shivering
- exhaustion
- confusion
- fumbling hands
- memory loss
- slurred speech
- drowsiness

Frostbite Signs & Symptoms:

Stage 1 (mild)
- redness
- pain or tingling
- numbness

Stage 2 (superficial)
- white or pale skin
- burning or stinging
- swelling
- blisters

Stage 3 (deep)
- white or bluish gray skin
- numbness
- loss of sensation
- loss of joint or muscle function
- large blisters
- black or hardening tissue

When treating frostbite, DO NOT:
- Walk on feet or toes with frostbite.
- Rub or massage areas with frostbite.
- Use a heating pad, electric blanket, fireplace, heat lamp, radiator, or stove for warming.
**Braving the Cold**

At some point this winter we will all have to leave the comfort of our cozy home. Dressing appropriately and using caution while walking and clearing snow can help you to prevent injury and reduce your risk of developing hypothermia or frostbite.

**Slip and Fall Prevention**

Anyone can fall on a slippery surface and the winter months have many hazards. These tips can help you maintain your balance and move with confidence across ice, snow or water covered surfaces.

- Stay on cleared sidewalks or paths.
- Pay attention to the surfaces around you.
- Wear shoes with good traction.
- Keep your driveway and sidewalk clear.
- Dress warm.
- Slow down.
- Be careful getting out of your car.
- Plan your trips in advance.
- Take short steps like a penguin.
- Keep your hands free.

**Snow Removal**

Your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so try not to overdo it. Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor’s advice about shoveling snow or other outdoor activities. Use caution and take breaks.

When shoveling, push the snow instead of lifting it and lift lighter loads when possible. If heavy, wet snow is anticipated, consider shoveling or snow blowing several times during the storm.

Always follow the manufacturers’ instructions when snow blowing. If your snow blower does clog, turn it OFF! Disengage the clutch and wait for the impeller blades to stop. Use a stick or broom handle to clear the impacted snow. Never put your hand down the chute or around the blades.

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**Dressing for cold weather:**

- **warm hat**
- facemask or scarf
- **inner layer** for insulating
- **outer layer** to keep out wind and snow
- gloves or mittens
- **waterproof boots**

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ON THE ROAD

The harshness of North Country winters makes it important to prepare your vehicle for bad weather or extreme cold. Regular vehicle maintenance can decrease your risk of an accident, vehicle breakdown, or other problem. Every vehicle handles differently. Take time to learn how your vehicle handles under winter weather conditions.

Driving Tips

Keep your gas tank full. A full tank will keep the fuel line from freezing.

If road conditions are hazardous, avoid driving if possible. Wait until road and weather conditions improve before venturing out in your vehicle.

Before driving your vehicle, clear snow, ice, and dirt from the windows, forward sensors, headlights, tail lights, backup camera and other sensors around the vehicle.

Drive slowly. It’s harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface. Give yourself more room between you and the car in front of you to allow plenty of time to stop. Do not use cruise control.

Know whether your vehicle has an anti-lock brake system and learn what do to if your vehicle starts to slide. Anti-lock brake systems prevent your wheels from locking up.

Navigating around snow plows

Don’t crowd a snow plow or travel beside it. Snow plows travel slowly, make wide turns, stop often, overlap lanes and exit the roadway frequently.

The road behind an active snow plow is safer to drive on. If you find yourself behind a snow plow, stay put or use caution when passing.

When you are driving behind a slow plow, don’t follow too closely. A snow plow operator’s field-of-vision is limited; if you can’t see their mirrors, the driver can’t see you. Materials used to de-ice the road could also hit your vehicle.

Snow plows can throw up a cloud of snow that can reduce your visibility to zero in less time than you can react. Never drive into a snow cloud—it can hide vehicles or other hazards.

Car Seats

Winter is a tricky time for car seats. As a general rule, bulky clothing, including winter coats and snowsuits, should not be worn underneath the harness of a car seat. To keep your child safe and warm in the car, dress your child in thin layers and use a coat or blanket over the straps. Don’t forget hats, mittens, and socks or booties.

Check your child’s seat!

The Clinton County Sheriff’s Office holds FREE Child Safety Seat Checks throughout the County.

For more information on this program or to find an upcoming date, call (518) 565-4300 or visit www.clintoncountygov.com/sheriff.
Winter vehicle preparedness includes a visit to your mechanic, and being ready with the right equipment if you get stuck on the road during the winter.

**Vehicle Safety Checklist**

**Check your battery.** As the temperature drops, so does your battery power. This also means more battery power will be used to start your car.

**Make sure all the lights on your vehicle are in working order.** This includes; headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers and interior lights.

**Be sure you have enough coolant** in your vehicle and that the cooling system is in working order.

Make sure your **windshield wipers, rear and front defrosters work**, and that your **wiper fluid tank is full**.

**Tires deflate when the temperature drops.** Make sure each tire is filled to the manufacturers’ recommended inflation pressure.

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**What if I get stuck on the road in the winter?**

- Stay with your vehicle and don’t over exert yourself.
- **Put bright markers** on your vehicle’s antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light turned on.
- To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, **don’t run your vehicle** for long periods of time with the windows up or in an enclosed space. If you must run your vehicle, clear the exhaust pipe of any snow and run it only for short periods of time – just long enough to stay warm.

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## KEEP A WELL STOCKED CAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Cell phone</th>
<th>Flashlight</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Snacks</th>
<th>Blankets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Road salt, cat</td>
<td>Shovel and</td>
<td>Hazard flags</td>
<td>Chains or rope</td>
<td>Coats, hats and mittens</td>
<td>Compressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road maps</td>
<td>Jumper cables</td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>First Aid Kit</td>
<td>Pocket knife</td>
<td>Batteries</td>
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Outdoor Activities

The North Country boasts some of the best scenery for winter outdoor sports in the country. From the Adirondacks to Lake Champlain there are hundreds of places to hike, hunt, ski, fish and play. Because of the extreme temperatures and secluded areas used for these activities, planning ahead is important. **Tell someone your plans**, including where you are going and when you plan to be back. Travel in groups when possible and always be prepared in case of an emergency. Avoid alcoholic beverages. They can impair your judgement in an emergency and may make you more likely to get frostbite or hypothermia.

Sun Safety

It’s not the heat of the sun that causes skin damage but radiation from the sun. High elevation exposes your skin to more radiation and the sun’s rays reflect off the snow.

**Protect your skin while enjoying winter fun.**
- Wear pants, long sleeves, and gloves even on warm days.
- Put on a hat or helmet that covers your ears.
- Wear 100% UV protection goggles or sunglasses.
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) to exposed skin every 2 hours.

Protect your Noggin’

While there is no such thing as a concussion-proof helmet, a ski helmet can help protect snowboarders and skiers from serious brain or head injury.

Start by making sure the helmet is the **right size**. A ski helmet should fit snugly all around, without any spaces between the padding and the skier’s head.

The helmet should not sit too high, or too low on your head. The front should sit about 1 inch above your eyebrows and the back of the helmet should not touch your neck.

**Make sure you can see** straight ahead and side-to-side.

**DO NOT use a cracked or broken helmet** or a helmet missing any padding or parts. A helmet must be replaced if it has been involved in a serious crash or is damaged.

**Look for an “ASTM certified” label**—this means the helmet has been tested for safety and meets safety standards.

For more information visit [www.cdc.gov/headsup](http://www.cdc.gov/headsup).

Layer up!

**Inner layer:** Wear fabrics that hold in your body heat without absorbing moisture. Wool, silk, or polypropylene will hold more body heat than cotton.

**Middle layer:** An insulating layer will help you retain heat by keeping air close to your body. Natural fibers, like wool or goose down, or a classic fleece work best.

**Outer layer:** The outermost layer helps protect you from wind, rain, and snow. It should be tightly woven, water and wind resistant.
**Winter Hiking**

It takes **more effort and energy** to move through the snow. Be sure to **choose trails** within your group’s abilities.

**Be aware** that temperatures are lower, winds are stronger and snow is deeper at higher elevations. **Use snowshoes or skis** when snow is deeper than 8 inches.

**Stay on the trails** to avoid unseen obstacles covered by snow. Use extreme caution when crossing ice.

**Rest often**, eat regularly and stay hydrated.

**Know what time the sun sets** and plan your trip so you return before dark. **Keep an eye on the conditions**; if they worsen, head back immediately.

**Snowmobiling**

Snowmobiling requires preparation for the rider and the sled. Snowmobiles need to be checked over and serviced with fuel and fluids before each ride. Long trips require physical stamina and can be hard on the rider. Get plenty of sleep, eat nourishing meals, and stay well hydrated. **Group riding is always the safest way to snowmobile.**

**Excessive speed and alcohol** use are the two highest contributing factors in fatal snowmobile crashes in New York State (NYS). Keep your speed on the trail in check and never ride under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

**NYS requires all snowmobile drivers and passengers wear a Snell or DOT approved safety helmet**, except when operating on private property owned by either the driver or passenger. Helmets provide warmth, impact protection and a platform for eye protection. Helmets should be snug but not uncomfortably tight and, most importantly, they should be buckled.

**Ice Fishing**

**Ice thickness should be your top priority.** Ice rarely freezes uniformly; it may be a foot deep in one location and just an inch thick a short distance away.

Find a trusted local resource that is **well-informed of the current ice conditions**. This could be a local bait and tackle shop, a lodge, guide or state agency.

**Always test the ice thickness when you arrive.** This can be done with an ice chisel, ice auger or cordless ¼ inch drill with a long bit.

**Firearm safety:**

1. Treat every firearm as if it is **loaded**.
2. Always keep the muzzle **pointed in a safe direction**.
3. **Keep your finger off the trigger** and outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.
4. Always be sure of what is in front of and behind your target. Once you pull the trigger you cannot take back the bullet!

**Hunting**

Hunting can be a taxing sport for even fit hunters. Each season, many hunters suffer heart attacks and strokes. Walking, carrying gear, shooting and dragging carcasses can place extra stress on your heart. Your risk increases if you are not regularly physically active, are a smoker, have high blood pressure or cholesterol, or have other health problems. Consult your doctor to be sure you are healthy enough to participate this hunting season.

**Ice thickness guide:**

- 2” or less — **STAY OFF**
- 4” — ice fishing or other activities on foot
- 5” — snowmobile or ATV
- 8-12” — car or small pickup
- 12-15” — medium truck
Information in this guide was adapted from:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov));
- New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH, [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov));
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services ([www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov));
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov));