

“Winters in New England can be harsh. What can I do to make sure I’m prepared?”

Winter weather and cold temperatures can be dangerous. Stay safe and healthy by planning ahead.

Stay safe at home

Take steps to winterize your home before winter weather hits.

- Install weather stripping, insulation and storm windows.
- Clean out gutters and repair roof leaks.
- Check your heating systems. Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure that it is clean, working properly and ventilated to the outside.
- Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys.
- Install a carbon monoxide (CO) detector to alert you of the presence of this deadly, odorless, colorless gas.
- Check the CO detector and smoke detector batteries when you change your clocks in the fall.

Stay safe in the car

Make sure your car is in good condition and ready for winter weather.

- Service the radiator and maintain a “full” antifreeze level.
- Check tire treads or, if necessary, replace tires with all-weather or snow tires.
- Keep the gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Use a wintertime formula in your windshield washer.
- Prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. The kit should include:
 1. A car charger for your cell phone
 2. A flashlight
 3. Blankets and first-aid supplies
 4. Food and water
 5. Booster cables, flares, tire pump, and a bag of sand or cat litter for traction

Stay safe outdoors

It's easy to get cold quickly if you are outside in winter weather. Learn safety precautions to follow when shoveling snow or participating in athletic activities during the winter.

- Always check the temperature and wind chill.
- Limit your time outdoors if it's very cold, wet or windy.
- Keep your skin dry, as wet skin freezes more quickly than dry skin.
- Make sure to wear several layers of loose clothing, including mittens or gloves, and cover your head and ears with a warm hat.
- Wear socks that will keep your feet warm and dry.
- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches.
- Remember to work slowly when doing outside chores.
- If you are participating in outdoor recreation or exercise, take a buddy and an emergency kit. Always carry a cell phone in case of falls or other emergencies.

Hypothermia and frostbite

In cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. This can lead to serious health problems such as frostbite and hypothermia.

Frostbite is freezing of the skin and the tissues under the skin. It leads to a loss of feeling and color in the areas it affects. It typically occurs in the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers and toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body. Severe cases can lead to removing the affected body part.

Hypothermia is caused by prolonged exposures to very cold temperatures. Lengthy exposures will eventually use up your body's stored energy. This leads to a lower body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain. It usually makes a person unable to think clearly or move well.

If you think you or someone you know is experiencing signs of frostbite or hypothermia, get medical attention as soon as possible. Get the person into a warm room or shelter. Remove any wet clothing. Warm up under dry layers of blankets and clothing. Place areas affected by frostbite in warm-to-touch—not hot—water.

Love it or hate it, winter weather happens. Make sure you are well prepared and stay safe during the winter.