

# Severe Weather Shelf Kit

Practical Tools for Real Time Public Information

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

 **AWARE  
PREPARE**  
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

***SEVERE WEATHER SHELF KIT***

**Provided by New York State Department of Health**

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## **PLAN TO BE PREPARED: OFFICIALS URGE [COUNTY] RESIDENTS TO THINK AHEAD ABOUT SEVERE WEATHER**

[CITY], NY, [DATE]– To be prepared for severe weather emergencies, [NAME OF COUNTY] health and emergency management officials are urging families to establish a disaster or emergency plan.

### **BE AWARE**

- Identify potential threats in your community, such as the location of flood-prone areas, power plants and hazardous chemicals.
- Discuss how natural and man-made threats could affect your family.
- Evaluate your property's vulnerability to hazards, such as storm surge, flooding and wildfires.
- Check your insurance coverage.

### **PREPARE**

- Identify the safest areas of your home for each threat. In many circumstances, the safest area may not be your home but elsewhere in your community. During times of evacuation, you will be given instructions on evacuation routes.
- Specify escape routes from your home and places to meet (rally points), such as a neighbor's home, a school or a public location.
- Make a plan for evacuating the area if required.
- Designate an out-of-area contact—friend or family member—so that each of your immediate family members has the same single point of contact. Plan to have at least two means of communication, (e.g., e-mail, phone and cell phone).
- Make a plan for your pets should you need to evacuate. Most shelters will accept service animals.
- Have your family emergency information accessible, including important family documents such as prescriptions and insurance information.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by your phones and make sure your children know how and when to call 911. Make sure any cell phones are fully charged.
- Assemble and maintain a disaster supply kit. This kit should contain:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
  - Portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries
  - Matches in a waterproof container
  - Water for drinking and household use (at least one gallon per person per day for three days)
  - Ready-to-eat canned foods to last three days
  - Manual can opener
  - Peanut butter, crackers, granola bars and other high-energy foods
  - Prescription and over-the-counter medication you regularly take
  - Special needs items for babies or elder family members
  - Bleach (for disinfecting)
  - Plastic bags and ties (for sanitation)
  - Credit card and cash
  - Personal identification
  - An extra set of keys
  - Important documents, such as your insurance policies.
- A battery-powered weather radio equipped with a special alarm tone feature is a vital tool. During an emergency, National Weather Service forecasters will interrupt routine weather radio programming and send out the special tone that activates weather radios in the listening area.

## **MONITOR AND ACT**

- When a severe storm occurs, listen to news sources for information and instructions.
- Evacuate or seek medical attention quickly if instructed by authorities. If you can not obtain information, determine as best you can if you are in a danger area.
- If you have to leave home, be sure to take prescription and over-the-counter medication you use regularly with you!
- Take along any special supplies such as diapers, baby food, and elder care items that you will need.
- Have some cash on hand—if the power is off, ATM machines won't be available.
- Whether you stay or evacuate, don't panic. Follow your plan.

For further information, please contact your local health department at [TELEPHONE NUMBER] or visit [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)

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## PILLS, PEOPLE AND PERIL—LEARN WHAT TO DO ABOUT MEDICATIONS DURING DISASTERS

[CITY], NY, [DATE]—In the event of a severe storm, you may need to evacuate your home and regular services may be temporarily limited. To ensure that you are able to continue taking your medications under such circumstances, the [NAME OF COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT] recommends that you **plan now** by taking the following measures:

- Call your doctor now and request a 30-day supply of medication if possible.
  - If your insurance coverage will not allow this, be sure to refill your prescription as soon as you can. Don't run short!
- Get a pill organizer and pack enough pills for two weeks – get assistance in this from your caregiver or medical professional in making sure you have packed enough of the medications you will need.
- Make a list of all your medications: how they should be taken, what time, etc. Make copies of the list. Put one copy with the medications; give one to a friend, and keep one with you at all times. Make sure to list any allergies, as well as foods you need to avoid. Your doctor's name and emergency phone number should also be on this list. Your medical professional or caregiver should be able to assist you in this.
- Keep your medications where you can get to them at a moment's notice so you can take them with you.
- If you are taking prescription narcotic pain medications, keep them with you at all times.
- If you are on a special diet or require special supplements, take a two-week supply with you if you have to evacuate your home.
- Over the counter items that you should also bring with you include: pain relievers such as Ibuprofen, antacid, laxative/suppository, Imodium, Benadryl, decongestant, antibiotic ointment, lubricating eye drops.
- If you are using respiratory medications with a nebulizer, bring it with you.

For more information, visit [LOCAL WEBSITE ADDRESS], [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov), or call [TELEPHONE NUMBER]

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## **FIRST AID KIT FAST FACTS!**

A first aid kit is something everyone should have on hand, but you don't have to buy an expensive kit from the store. Use the information below to put your own kit together. Keep your first aid supplies in a tool box or fishing tackle box so they will be easy to carry and be protected from water. Inspect your kit regularly and keep it freshly stocked.

Your first aid kit should contain the following drugs and medications:

- Hydrogen peroxide to wash and disinfect wounds
- Antibiotic ointment
- Individually wrapped alcohol swabs
- Aspirin and non-aspirin tablets
- Prescriptions and any long-term medications (keep these current)
- Diarrhea medicine
- Eye drops

NOTE: Important medical information and most prescriptions can be stored in the refrigerator, which provides excellent protection from fires.

To treat wounds, have a variety of dressings available, including:

- Band-aids
- Clean sheets torn into strips
- Elastic bandages
- Rolled gauze
- Cotton-tipped swabs
- Adhesive tape roll

Other first aid supplies you will need:

- First aid book
- Writing materials
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Thermometer
- Bar of soap
- Tissues
- Sunscreen
- Paper cups
- Plastic bags
- Safety pins
- Needle and thread
- Instant cold packs for sprains
- Sanitary napkins
- Pocket knife
- Splinting material

If cost is a problem, buy these items a few at a time. If someone is hurt, they could be priceless!

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## **[NAME OF OFFICIAL] URGES PRECAUTIONS FOR RESIDENTS IN AREAS HIT BY FLOODING**

[CITY] NY, [DATE] – [NAME/TITLE] today reminded people living in parts of the county ravaged by heavy rains that flooding can pose unexpected hazards, and urged individuals in affected areas to take all necessary precautions to protect their health and safety.

“During flooding, the greatest threat comes from moving water,” [NAME] warned. “Water moving at just two miles per hour can sweep a car off a bridge. People should avoid driving in moving water, regardless of the size of their vehicle. Keep in mind that road surfaces can become obscured, and drivers can unknowingly steer into a deep body of water. Don’t be in a hurry—know what you are getting into and be sure it is safe to proceed.”

According to county emergency management officials, travelers should not attempt to cross a stream or pool of water unless they are certain that the water will not be over their knees, or above the middle of their car’s wheels, all the way across. “If you do decide it is safe to cross, put your car in low gear and drive very slowly to avoid splashing water into your engine and causing it to stop. Also, remember that your brakes may not work well after the car has been in deep water. Try them out a few times when you reach the other side.”

[NAME] also urged residents in flood-prone or stricken areas to follow the instructions and advice of local government officials. It is important to stay aware of current conditions and emergency information in your community by monitoring local radio and TV broadcasts. If evacuation is advised, do so promptly. Follow instructions on where to go and what travel routes to follow. Don’t attempt to find short cuts.

As you travel, watch for washed-out roads, earth slides, broken water or sewer mains, loose or downed electrical wires and falling or fallen objects. Undamaged streetlights and power poles also may be hazardous. These may be active through standing water, causing a deadly shock to anyone coming in contact with it.

Health and safety concerns may persist even after flood waters have receded, [NAME OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL] cautioned. “After a flood, it is crucial to protect your family from developing illnesses associated with contaminated water, food, and air in an affected region.”

After a flood, homeowners should take precautions before drinking tap water. If you are on public water, follow directions from the local health department and water supplier. If you are on a private well, it may have been affected by the flood. Contact your local health department for guidance. If needed, they can tell you how to disinfect, flush and sample your well water. They can also direct you to a private laboratory or other services available within your county.

Health officials recommend the following:

**FOODS:**

- Foods exposed to flood waters should be discarded because of possible contamination.
- Destroy the contents of foods in glass jars that have been exposed to flood waters. Their food-safety seals may have been broken. Destroy canned foods when swelling, rusting or serious denting is visible.
- Cook all foods thoroughly. Frozen foods that have been thawed should be discarded if not consumed immediately, or kept refrigerated at 45 degrees F. or lower.

**HOUSEHOLD CLEAN-UP:**

- Prior to flooding, power should have been turned off in cellars. If possible, wait for ground waters to drop below floor level. Otherwise, drain or pump water from flooded cellars. Wash down the walls, floors and other areas exposed to flood waters with soap and hot water. Keep windows and doors open for ventilation. Disinfect the washed areas by applying a solution of bleach with a broom. The solution is prepared by adding four tablespoons of bleach to five gallons of water. Allow the solution to remain on the surface for approximately 10 minutes. Rinse with cold water as soon as possible to minimize staining.
- Furniture: Clean and then wash metal and leather surfaces with mild soap and water and wipe dry immediately. Some upholstery may be washed on the surface with soap and water and wiped dry. Expose to open air and sunshine.
- Floor Coverings: Flush rugs and carpets with a hose and squeegee, then wash with lukewarm water containing a detergent. Rinse and dry in sun.

**SAFETY:**

- Rubber gloves should be worn while scrubbing damaged interiors with a bleach solution.
- Don't neglect supposedly minor cuts, scratches or other injuries or sickness experienced during the emergency.
- Individuals who suffer injury that results in an open wound or who swallow contaminated flood water should seek medical attention.

For more information, please visit the State Emergency Management Office web site at: [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us), the State Health Department web site at: [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov), [LOCAL WEBSITE ADDRESS] or call [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

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## **FLOOD RECOVERY—RESTORING WATER WELLS**

After flooding, private well owners should take actions to ensure their private water supply is safe for consumption. When a water supply well has been affected by flood waters, the water within the well may be contaminated with waterborne pathogens (germs) that can cause serious illness in humans and pets. If you believe that your well has been contaminated, discontinue using your well water for drinking and cooking purposes, and use only disinfected or bottled water.

This fact sheet provides guidance on how to address possible pathogen contamination. Drinking water wells can also be contaminated by fuel oil or other chemical products released during the flood (such as from home oil tanks and agricultural tanks). *If you believe your well may be contaminated by petroleum or other chemicals do not use your well and immediately contact your local Health Department or the Department of Environmental Conservation Spill Hotline at 1-800-457-7362.*

The actions needed to get a well back into service safely fall into five categories: Assessment, Repair, Flushing, Disinfection, and Sampling.

### **ASSESSMENT**

A flood will leave warning signs that water wells may be unsafe. Below are things that a well owner can look for, any one of these signs may indicate that a well is contaminated. Most private wells have the pump located inside the well casing and submerged, so well owners will probably not be able to inspect the pump. Well owners should contact a qualified professional, registered well driller or pump contractor, to evaluate and service well pumps.

1. Is the well located in or near the area that was flooded? If you did not see the area during the flood, debris and mud in the area and water or mud stains on the well can indicate that the well was flooded.
2. Is the ground surface around the well intact and stable? During flooding the ground around the well may erode, possibly creating unsafe conditions or a pathway for surface water and contaminants to enter the well.
3. Are there any electrical components or wires visible? Visible electrical wires may be dangerous and should be avoided due to electrical shock. If electrical connections or controls located outside the well casing remain submerged, turning on the pump may cause electrical shock or damage to the system. A qualified electrician should be contacted.
4. Is any damage to the well casing visible? A bent or cracked well casing may allow surface water, sediment and debris to enter the well and will increase the risk of contamination.
5. Is the well cap and seal securely fastened to the well casing? A loose well cap can allow sediment and debris to enter the well and contaminate it.

## **REPAIR**

Do not turn on your well pump until the well has been assessed and repaired as needed. And do not drink or wash with well water until the well has been restored by proper disinfection and flushing. Here are some well restoration and repair tips:

**General Cleaning** - To avoid damage to the well, mud, silt and other debris should be removed from the well casing, cap, and other accessible components. Be sure electricity is off before you clean any electrical components. If excessive mud, silt or sediment has entered the well, the pump may need to be removed before cleaning can take place.

**Well Drainage** - Regrade the ground around the well to direct all surface water away from the well casing. Surface water will contain contaminants that can readily migrate into the well if surface water is allowed to flow down along the well casing.

**Well and Pump Inspection** - Floodwater carries large debris that can dislodge parts of the well and distort or crack the well casing. Floodwater may also deposit a large amount of sediment in the well. If any of these conditions are observed you should have professionals repair your system.

**Electrical System** - If the pump's control box was submerged during the flood, its electrical components should be cleaned and dry before electrical service is restored. Do not attempt to clean electrical components without being 100% sure electricity is shut off. Consider hiring a qualified electrician to clean and inspect.

**Pump Operation** - If after cleaning and general repair, your well will not start or pump water, turn off the electricity and get assistance from a registered well driller or pump contractor.

**Pumping the Well** - After the well has been inspected and cleaned, the well should be pumped until the water runs clear to rid the well of floodwater. Use an outside spigot and a hose to direct the water to a nearby drainage way rather than into your septic system or public sewer (after flooding, both septic systems and public sewers may be overwhelmed and do not need more water). Depending on the size and depth of the well and extent of contamination, pumping times will vary... it may take thirty minutes, or it could be several hours or days.

## **DISINFECTION**

Any water well that has been flooded should be disinfected before using it for washing, drinking or cooking. Even if your well is operational, you should disinfect your water until it is tested and found suitable for drinking. Changes in the water's appearance, taste or odor may indicate possible contamination.

**DISINFECTING WATER FOR HOME USE:** If your well was impacted by flooding, you can disinfect the water to make it safe for drinking and culinary purposes. Here are three different ways to do this:

**Disinfection by Boiling: (NOTE: Disinfection by boiling produces the safest water)**

- Bring water to a rolling boil, and keep a full boil for at least one minute.
- Let the water cool before drinking.
- Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring it back and forth between two containers. This will also improve the taste of stored water.

**Using Liquid Chlorine Bleach**

- Disinfect water by adding eight drops of liquid chlorine bleach (4-6% available chlorine) per gallon of water (up to sixteen drops if the water is cloudy)
- Stir, and let stand for 30 minutes.
- If the water does not taste and smell of chlorine at that point, add another dose of bleach and let stand for another 15 minutes.

**Using Iodine or Chlorine Tablets**

- Check the expiration date for the tablets before using.
- Follow the package directions.
- Usually one tablet is enough for one quart of water.
- Double the dose if the water is cloudy.

**DISINFECTING A WELL:** Here is a step by step method to sanitize a contaminated well before restoring it to full use:

1. Attach a hose to the outdoor faucet that is closest to the well or pressure tank. Run water through the hose until it is clear.
2. Mix two quarts household bleach containing about 5% chlorine in 10 gallons of water in a large bucket or pail in the area of the well casing.
3. Turn electrical power off to the well pump. Carefully remove the well cap and well seal if necessary. Set aside.
4. Place hose connected to outdoor faucet inside the well casing. Turn electrical power back on to the well pump and turn water on to run the pump.
5. Carefully pour the water and bleach mixture from the bucket or pail down the open well casing. At the same time, continue to run the water from the hose placed inside the well casing.
6. At each indoor and outdoor faucet, run the water until a chlorine odor is present, and then shut each faucet off.
7. Continue running water through the hose, down inside the well casing to recirculate the chlorine treated water. Use the hose to also wash down the inside of the well casing.
8. After one hour of recirculating the water, shut all faucets off to stop the pump. Disconnect power supply to pump. Remove recirculator hose from well.

9. Mix two more quarts of bleach in 10 gallons of water and pour mixture down the well casing. Disinfect the well cap and seal by rinsing with a chlorine solution. Replace well seal and cap. Allow the well to stand idle for at least eight hours and preferably 12 to 24 hours. Avoid using the water during this time.
10. After the well has been idle for the recommended period of time, flush the chlorinated water out of the well. Turn the pump on and run the water using an outdoor faucet and garden hose in an area away from grass and shrubbery until the odor of chlorine disappears. Run all indoor and outdoor faucets until the odor and taste of chlorine disappears.

### **SAMPLING**

After a contaminated well has been properly disinfected and the chlorine has been flushed out of the water system, the water should be tested to confirm that contamination has been removed. If chlorine odors persist, you may have to do additional flushing or wait several days before testing to be sure that all the chlorine has been flushed from the water system. Until testing shows that the water is free of contamination, you should continue to use bottled water or disinfect water for drinking and food preparation as described in the section **Disinfecting Water**.

You may wish to consider retesting the well water again after several weeks. If flooding and groundwater contamination is extensive, your well may be susceptible to recontamination for some time.

You can contact [TELEPHONE NUMBER] for more information about testing your well.

### **ADDITIONAL PROTECTION MEASURES**

There are some improvements you can make to protect your well from future damage.

**New Well.** If frequent flooding of your well occurs, consider drilling a new well where it is not subject to seasonal flooding. Make sure your well is constructed in such a manner that seasonal floodwater cannot enter the well. Contact a registered well driller for advice.

**Grading.** The ground surface immediately surrounding a well casing and, if possible, the property in general, should be graded to divert surface water away from the well. If erosion around the well has been a problem, consider armoring the area with vegetation or other erosion control measures

**Extend Casing.** Casing can be extended to a height above the expected or experienced level of the floodwater to protect against wellhead submersion.

**Well Cap.** Install a watertight and vermin proof well cap.

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## **FLOOD RECOVERY—SAMPLING PRIVATE WELLS**

During flooding events, private drinking water wells can easily become contaminated with flood waters. The Fact Sheet “FLOOD RECOVERY - Restoring Private Wells” provides advice on how to determine if your well may be contaminated, and how to restore it for safe use. It advises that flood-impacted drinking water wells should be sampled. If your well was covered with flood waters, or if your well is shallow and near an area that was flooded, then you should consider sampling it for bacteriological contamination.

Use this checklist to help decide when you are ready to sample. Sampling of your well should not take place until the following has occurred:

- The area around the well has drained of flood waters and has been cleaned up.
- The well is good condition and operable. Any needed repairs have been completed.
- The well has been flushed of any flood water that entered the well and the well and attached plumbing has been properly disinfected.
- After disinfection, the well has been flushed to remove chlorinated water.

After all of the above conditions have been met and checked, sampling may take place. Proper sampling techniques are very important for true and accurate results. Follow these steps when sampling your well:

1. Obtain a sterile "BacT" bottle from a commercial laboratory. Look in the telephone book under “Laboratories-Testing” to find an environmental laboratory in your area. Do not open the bottle until you are ready to fill it, and close it immediately once it is filled with sample water. Do not rinse the contents from bottle. Do not touch the inside of the bottle or bottle cap with your fingers (if you do, stop and get another bottle).
2. From the kitchen cold water tap remove the anti-splash screen from the faucet.
3. Disinfect the faucet tip by dipping the tip in chlorine bleach (use bleach cap to bring bleach to the faucet tip); or by “flaming” the faucet tip with a lighter or match for 10 seconds (be sure to remove rubber faucet seals first).
4. Let the cold water run for 4 - 5 minutes.
5. Fill the sterile bottle to the 100 ml line and cap it tightly. REMEMBER... do not touch the inside of the bottle or lid.
6. Fill out the sample label and form provided by the lab, especially remember to add contact and address information.
7. Put the filled bottle in your refrigerator until you are ready to return it.
8. Return the bottle to \_\_\_\_\_ (your chosen laboratory) \_\_\_\_\_.

**If you have questions, please contact your local health department at [TELEPHONE NUMBER] for more information.**

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## **WHEN THERE'S A FLOOD—WHAT TO KNOW AND DO**

**[INSERT INTRODUCTORY TOPICAL INFORMATION HERE]**

### **Before You Evacuate**

If there is time, move important papers, television sets, computers, stereo equipment and easily moveable appliances such as a microwave oven to the upper floors of your home.

If your basement floods before you have a chance to shut off electric and natural gas service, do not enter the basement. There is the possibility of electric shock if any electrical wires are touching the water. Contact your electric company as soon as possible.

If you have to leave your home, use the following checklists to help you do so safely and minimize the amount of damage to your home while you are away.

- **Turn off all electrical appliances.**
- **Turn off the electricity at the main fuse or circuit breaker.**
- **Turn off water at the main valve.**
- **Turn off propane gas service.** Propane tanks often become dislodged in emergency situations.
- **Leave natural gas on.** Unless local officials advise otherwise, leave natural gas on because you will need it for heating and cooking when you return home. If you turn the gas off, a licensed professional is required to turn it back on and it may take weeks for a professional to respond.
- **Drain your plumbing if it is likely that the temperature in your house will go below freezing.** Shut off the water service valve. Then turn on the highest and lowest hot and cold water taps in the house (often a laundry sink in the basement is the lowest tap). This will drain most of the water out of your system. Also, flush toilets and remove water from lower bowl to prevent freezing damage. Leave all taps open until you return.

### **On the Road**

If you evacuate because of a flood, do not drive around barricades; they are there for your safety. If your car stalls in rapidly rising water, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.

## **Returning Home After the Flood:**

- **Stay informed!** Listen to the radio or TV for instructions from local officials. Wait until an area has been declared safe before entering it.
- **Be careful driving.** Roads may be damaged and power lines may be down.
- **Stay away from downed power lines.**

- **Before entering a building, check for structural damage.** Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Air out the building to remove foul odors or escaping gases.
- **When entering the building, use a battery-powered flashlight.**
- **Do not use an open flame as a source of light.** Gas may be trapped inside the structure.
- **When inspecting the building, wear rubber boots and gloves.**
- **Watch for electrical shorts and live wires before making certain the main power switch is off.**
- **Do not turn on electrical appliances until an electrician has checked the system.**

## **Cleaning Up After a Flood**

### ***Garbage Storage, Collection and Disposal ...***

As you start cleaning, you will likely produce a great deal of garbage. Local authorities will tell you where and when collection will occur.

Garbage invites insects and rodents. Rodents, in particular, may be looking for food because the flood may have destroyed their homes and normal food source. Store garbage in watertight, rodent/insect-proof containers with tight-fitting covers. Use plastic liners if available. Pile garbage in a convenient location but not near your well. If a rodent problem develops, use traps purchased at your local hardware, lawn, garden and grocery stores. Standing water is a breeding ground for some insects. When possible, drain or fill areas of standing water.

### ***Flush Toilets ...***

If floodwaters are covering your septic tank and leach field, you should not use any flush toilets attached to the system. Septic systems rely on gravity to pull the wastewater down and away from the surface. When the system is flooded, wastewater can rise and mix with surface water, exposing people to human waste. If you are unable to use the toilets in your home, use portable toilets such as the type used for camping. Some communities may set up banks of commercial portable toilets for resident use.

### ***Food, Containers and Utensils ...***

Raw foods that were exposed to flood waters may be contaminated and should not be eaten. Food and food containers that have been in or splashed with floodwaters need to be either thrown away or properly cleaned. Canned foods can be used unless the cans are swollen, rusted, seriously dented, or the contents cannot be identified. Wash off food cans that are still sealed and disinfect them for five minutes in a bleach solution of two teaspoons of bleach per gallon of water.

Discard food containers with lids that are screwed on or pressed on (such as soda and beer bottles). They cannot be cleaned adequately. Clean and disinfect dishes, utensils and cookware in a solution of two teaspoons bleach per gallon of water. Do NOT use this method on sterling silver tableware. The bleach will cause these items to tarnish. Sanitize sterling silver by putting it in boiling water for at least two minutes.



### ***Household Cleanup ...***

During flood cleanup, the indoor air quality in your home or office may appear to be the least of your problems. However, flooding may cause indoor air quality problems that could last for a long time and cause you and your family to get sick. The next few pages provide information about how to reduce the likelihood that you will have indoor air quality problems. The information is intended to be used in conjunction with the FEMA/Red Cross booklet **Repairing Your Flooded Home** (to access, click the link below).

[http://www.redcross.org/wwwfiles/Documents/pdf/Preparedness/file\\_cont333\\_lang0\\_150.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/wwwfiles/Documents/pdf/Preparedness/file_cont333_lang0_150.pdf)

### ***Preparing for Cleanup ...***

You can obtain free booklet, **Repairing Your Flooded Home** by clicking on the above link, or from your local health department, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or your local chapter of the American Red Cross (see listings the end of this section). Read the booklet carefully before cleanup because it discusses flood safety issues and can save your life. The booklet also contains detailed information about proper methods for cleaning your home.

### ***Remove Standing Water ...***

For health reasons and to lessen structural damage, all standing water should be removed as quickly as possible. The water can “wick” into the walls causing a greater area to be affected. Standing water is a breeding ground for bacteria and mold, which can become airborne and be inhaled. Where floodwater contains sewage or decaying animal carcasses, infectious disease is a concern. Even when flooding is due to rainwater, the growth of bacteria and mold can cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.

**An exception to the water removal rule is if there is fuel oil floating on top of the water in a flooded basement.** This usually happens when a basement floods and the oil tank was not properly fastened to the floor. The oil should be cleaned up before the water is pumped out. If the oil is not removed first, then the walls and floor will be coated with oil as the water is removed.

Oil should not be discharged to the ground outside because oil can contaminate drinking water wells and storm water runoff. Environmental contractors have special apparatus to contain the spilled oil. Contact the Department of Environmental Conservation Region 3 office at (845) 256-3121 for more information.

### ***Use Cleaners and Disinfectants Wisely ...***

Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants together. Check labels for warnings. Mixing certain types of products can produce toxic fumes and result in injury and even death.

The cleanup process involves thorough washing and disinfecting of the walls, floors, closets, shelves and contents of the house. In most cases, common household cleaning products and disinfectants can be used for this task.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency also suggests using disinfectants and sanitizers when cleaning the heating and air conditioning ductwork if it has been flooded. However, be aware that disinfectants and sanitizers contain substances that can cause other problems.

The health effects from chemicals in household cleaning products vary greatly, from “no known health effects” to “serious health effects.” Read and follow label instructions carefully and provide fresh air by opening windows and doors. If it is safe for you to use electricity and if the house is dry, use fans both during and after the use of disinfecting, cleaning and sanitizing products.

### ***Drinking Water ...***

After a flood, homeowners should take precautions before drinking tap water. If you are on public water, follow directions from the local health department and water supplier. If you are on a private well, it may have been affected by the flood. Contact your local health department for guidance. If needed, they can tell you how to disinfect, flush and sample your well water. They can also direct you to a private laboratory or other services available within your county.

- If your well has been covered over with floodwaters, it should be disinfected.
- Follow local officials' water usage restrictions to conserve water.
- If you must use water of unknown quality, it should be disinfected.

### ***Excess Moisture and Indoor Air Quality ...***

Bacteria and mold brought into the home during flooding may present a health hazard. These organisms can penetrate deep into soaked, porous materials and later be released into the air or water. Coming into contact with air or water that contains these organisms can make you sick. High humidity and moist materials provide ideal environments for the excessive growth of bacteria and mold that are always present in the home. This may result in additional health concerns such as allergic reactions.

Also, increases in home humidity over the long term can foster the growth of dust mites that are a major contributor of allergic reactions and problems with asthma.

Be patient. The drying out process could take several weeks and the growth of bacteria and mold will continue as long as humidity is high. If the house is not dried out properly, a musty odor, which signifies the growth of bacteria and mold, can remain long after the flood.

Remove wet materials: Discarding items, particularly those with sentimental value, can be difficult for some people. However, keeping certain items soaked by water may be unhealthy. Some materials tend to absorb and keep water more than others. As a general rule, materials that are wet and cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried may have to be discarded because they can remain a source of bacteria growth.

### ***Drying Out Construction Materials ...***

Look in the FEMA/ Red Cross booklet, **Repairing Your Flooded Home**, “Step 4,” for an explanation of how to dry out the different types of construction material that are used in your house (for example, plaster, wallboard, insulation).

The booklet suggests that you may be able to dry out and save these building materials. You may, however, want to consider removing and replacing them to avoid indoor air quality problems. Because they take a long time to dry, these materials may be a source of bacteria growth.

In addition, fiberboard, fibrous insulation and disposable filters should be replaced if they are in your heating and air conditioning system and came in contact with water. If a filter was designed to be cleaned with water and was in contact with clean rain water only, thoroughly clean it before reinstalling.

Dry out your home as quickly as possible. Dehumidifiers, fans and open windows all help. Avoid using too much heat because it will encourage bacteria and mold growth more quickly.

### ***Well Contamination ...***

If the area around your well gets flooded or if you suspect that your well is contaminated, you need to disinfect the water in the well before using it for washing and at the tap before using it for drinking water or for cooking. You should continue disinfection at the tap until the water is tested and found suitable for drinking. Contact your local health department for information about testing your well. You may be asked to arrange for testing by a commercial laboratory. Changes in the water's appearance, taste or odor may indicate possible contamination.

After disinfecting the well, the water should be tested to determine whether all bacterial contamination has been removed. You should wait several days to test the water to be sure that all the chlorine has been flushed from the water system. Until testing shows that the water is free of contamination, you should continue to use bottled or disinfected water for drinking and food preparation as described in "Disinfecting Water."

You may wish to consider retesting the well water again after several weeks. If flooding and groundwater contamination is extensive, your well may not be a suitable source of drinking water for some time.

Severe flooding that damages the well casing, deposits debris around the well or submerges electrical controls will require a qualified professional for evaluation, servicing and disinfection.

### ***Procedure for Disinfecting a Well ...***

- Run water until clear, using an outdoor faucet closest to the well or pressure tank.
- Mix two quarts household bleach containing about 5% chlorine in 10 gallons of water in a large bucket or pail in the area of the well casing.
- Turn electrical power off to the well pump. Carefully remove the well cap and well seal if necessary. Set aside.
- Place hose connected to outdoor faucet inside well casing. Turn electrical power back on to the well pump and turn water on to run the pump.
- Carefully pour the water and bleach mixture from the bucket or pail down the open well casing. At the same time, continue to run the water from the hose placed inside the well casing.
- At each indoor and outdoor faucet, run the water until a chlorine odor is present, and then shut each faucet off.

- Continue running water through the hose inside the well casing to recirculate the chlorine treated water. Use the hose to also wash down the inside of the well casing.
- After one hour of recirculating the water, shut all faucets off to stop the pump.
- Disconnect power supply to pump. Remove recirculation hose from well. Mix two more quarts of bleach in 10 gallons of water and pour mixture down the well casing. Disinfect the well cap and seal by rinsing with a chlorine solution. Replace well seal and cap. Allow the well to stand idle for at least eight hours and preferably 12 to 24 hours. Avoid using the water during this time.
- After the well has idled for the recommended period of time, turn the pump on and run the water using an outdoor faucet and garden hose in an area away from grass and shrubbery until the odor of chlorine disappears. Run all indoor and outdoor faucets until the odor and taste of chlorine disappears.

### ***Avoid Airborne Asbestos and Lead Dust***

If you have to remove all or part of walls or floors, lead or asbestos-containing materials (for example, paint, plaster, pipe wrap) could be disturbed, causing lead dust or asbestos fibers to be spread around your home. Lead is a highly toxic metal that produces a range of health effects, particularly in young children. Long term exposure to airborne asbestos can cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest and abdominal lining.

If you know or suspect that your home contains lead-based paint or asbestos, contact the New York State Department of Health at 800-458-1158 for information about steps you should take to avoid contaminating your home.

### **TO LEARN MORE:**

***New York State Department of Health***

[www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)

New York State Department of Health

Center for Environmental Health

Toll free: (800) 458-1158

### ***OTHER RESOURCES ...***

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) FEMA provides information and services for the public concerning natural and man-made disasters. Copies of the booklet **Repairing Your Flooded Home** are available from FEMA or the American Red Cross (The booklet's publication number is ARC 4477. See American Red Cross contact information below).

[www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) Every county has an emergency management office. Requests for individual assistance should be made through your county emergency management office, which can be found in your local telephone book. Some county emergency management offices are part of a county government web site. The New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) can assist county emergency management agencies as needed.

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) Contact your local Red Cross listed in the telephone book. If you cannot find a local contact, call the Red Cross at (800) 787-9282.

[www.salvationarmyusa.org](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org) Your local Salvation Army Office is listed in the telephone book. The Salvation Army has local, regional and national disaster service programs. Salvation Army staff and volunteers assist in both local incidents and major disasters. Salvation Army disaster response teams are coordinated and directed by commissioned officers and trained personnel and supported by volunteers.

***In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have helpful information on their web sites devoted to flood response.***

[www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/flood.html](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/flood.html) [www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/images/floods.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/images/floods.pdf)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/>

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## **OFFICIALS OFFER SNOWSTORM/ICE STORM HEALTH/SAFETY ADVICE**

[CITY], NY, [DATE]—[NAME /TITLE OF OFFICIAL] today offered advice in the wake of the recent severe snowstorm that has left many local residents without power, and with a big clean-up job on their hands.

“Cleaning up from a snowstorm is hard work,” [NAME] said. “Before you pick up a snow shovel, consider your physical condition. If you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember to dress appropriately and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.”

[NAME] said that the storm’s aftermath presents numerous additional health and safety concerns, and cautioned that frail or elderly individuals are at increased risk. Older individuals are particularly vulnerable to cold temperatures, and may not be able to stay in their homes during a long power outage. Even if they still have electricity, they may need help digging out.

Check on your family or neighbors and find out how they’re doing. Make sure they know what to do—and what *not* to do—to protect their health.”

### **Generator safety**

Never run a generator inside your home, basement or attached garage. Generators should only be operated outside, away from open windows, downwind and beyond 30 feet away from any buildings if possible. Carbon monoxide in the generator's fumes can build up and cause carbon monoxide poisoning, which can lead to death. Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading your generator can damage it and any appliances connected to it. Fire may result. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Fuel spilled on a hot generator can cause an explosion. If your generator has a detachable fuel tank, remove it before refilling. If this is not possible, shut off the generator and let it cool before refilling.

### **Alternate Heating Sources**

If you use a fireplace, wood stove, or portable kerosene heater to stay warm, be sure there is adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough fresh air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up in your home. Never use a natural gas or propane stove/oven to heat your home. If you are using a kerosene heater, use 1-K grade kerosene only. Never substitute with fuel oil, diesel, gasoline or yellow (regular) kerosene.

Open a window to provide ventilation when a portable kerosene heater is in use to reduce carbon monoxide fumes inside the home. If you plan to cook on a barbeque grill or camp stove, remember these also produce carbon monoxide and are for outdoor use only.

## **Fire safety**

When adding fuel to a space heater, or wood to a wood stove or fireplace, wear non-flammable gloves and clothing.

Never add fuel to a space heater when it is hot. The fuel can ignite, burning you and your home. Keep the heater away from objects that can burn, such as furniture, rugs or curtains. If you have a fire extinguisher, keep it nearby. Be careful with candles—never leave them burning if you leave the room. Keep children away from space heaters, fireplaces and wood stoves to avoid accidental burns.

## **Chain saw safety**

If heavy snow or ice has downed tree limbs, you may need to use a chain saw to clean up debris. Be especially careful around chain saws. Before using a chain saw to clear downed tree limbs, know how to safeguard against injury. Always operate, adjust, and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions provided in the manual accompanying the chain saw.

- Properly sharpen chain saw blades and properly lubricate the blade with bar and chain oil. Additionally, the operator should periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade to ensure good cutting action.
- Choose the proper size of chain saw to match the job, and include safety features such as a chain brake, front and rear hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester.
- Wear the appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg-wear (chain saw chaps) that extend from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until the lines are verified as being de-energized.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure that you maintain secure control over the chain saw.

Bystanders or co-workers should remain at least 2 tree lengths (at least 150 feet) away from anyone felling a tree and at least 30 feet from anyone operating a chain saw to remove limbs or cut a fallen tree.

## **Food safety**

During a power outage, open your refrigerator and freezer as little as possible. Eat the most perishable items first, such as leftovers, meat, poultry and food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.

Despite your best efforts, the food in your freezer may partially or completely thaw before power is restored. Foods that have completely thawed, but are still cold and have been kept cold for no longer than one or two days after thawing, may be eaten or refrozen under certain conditions:

- Fruits may be eaten or refrozen if they still taste and smell good.
- Do not eat or refreeze vegetables that have thawed completely since bacteria multiply rapidly in them.
- Meat and poultry should be thrown away if their color or odor is poor or questionable, or if they have been held at a temperature warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours.
- Fish and shellfish should not be eaten or refrozen once they have thawed.

Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out!

More information is available at [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov) and [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) or by calling [PHONE NUMBER]

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## **SNOWSTORM HEALTH ADVICE FOR INDIVIDUALS ON DIALYSIS**

[CITY,] NY [DATE]—[NAME/TITLE OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL] offers the following advice for individuals with End State Renal Disease (kidney disease) who cannot keep their scheduled dialysis appointments because of the recent heavy snowstorm in [COUNTY]:

- Call your health care provider as soon as possible for guidance about what you should do.
- Be more careful than ever about following your dietary restrictions and limiting fluid intake.
- Consume no more than two cups of fluid every 24 hours, and do not eat fresh fruit or vegetables since many of these—especially bananas—are high in potassium.
- If you are running out of prescription medications and can't leave your home, ask a friend, relative or neighbor for help.
- If you must go to a shelter, tell the person in charge about your special needs.
- If you have to leave home, make sure your dialysis facility knows where to find you.

For those who have electricity and internet access, the booklet, *Guide for People on Dialysis: Preparing for Emergencies*, provides a three-day emergency diet and other helpful information. It is available online at: [www.rsnhope.org/resources/PreparingforEmergenices.pdf](http://www.rsnhope.org/resources/PreparingforEmergenices.pdf)

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## SNOWSTORM/ICE STORM HEALTH AND SAFETY TALKING POINTS

*The storm's aftermath presents numerous health and safety concerns, and frail or elderly individuals are at increased risk.*

- Older individuals are particularly vulnerable to cold temperatures, and may not be able to stay in their homes during a long power outage. Even if they still have electricity, they may need help digging out.
- **Check on your family or neighbors and find out how they're doing.** Make sure they know what to do—and what *not* to do—to protect their health.

*Cleaning up from a snowstorm is hard work. Before you pick up a snow shovel, consider your physical condition.*

- If you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside.
- Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember to dress appropriately and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.

*Be especially careful around chain saws. Before using a chain saw to clear downed tree limbs, know how to safeguard against injury.*

Operate, adjust, and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions provided in the manual accompanying the chain saw.

- Properly sharpen chain saw blades and properly lubricate the blade with bar and chain oil. Additionally, the operator should periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade to ensure good cutting action.
- Choose the proper size of chain saw to match the job, and include safety features such as a chain brake, front and rear hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester.
- Wear the appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg-wear (chain saw chaps) that extend from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until the lines are verified as being de-energized.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure that you maintain secure control over the chain saw.

*Bystanders or co-workers should remain at least two tree lengths (at least 150 feet) away from anyone felling a tree and at least 30 feet from anyone operating a chain saw to remove limbs or cut a fallen tree.*

- Beware of injury from the release of bent trees or branches. If the tree or the branch is suddenly released, it may strike the person cutting it, or a bystander, with enough force to cause serious injury or death.
- Even a seemingly small tree or branch (2 inches in diameter, for example) may pose a hazard when it is released from tension.

- If injury occurs, apply direct pressure over site(s) of heavy bleeding; this act may save lives.

***If you use a generator to provide emergency power, know how to use it safely.***

- Never run a generator inside your home, basement or attached garage. Generators should only be operated outside, away from open windows, downwind and beyond 30 feet away from any buildings if possible. Carbon monoxide in the generator's fumes can build up and cause carbon monoxide poisoning, which can lead to death.
- Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading your generator can damage it and any appliances connected to it. Fire may result. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Fuel spilled on a hot generator can cause an explosion. If your generator has a detachable fuel tank, remove it before refilling. If this is not possible, shut off the generator and let it cool before refilling.

***If you use alternate heating source, take steps to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.***

If you use a fireplace, wood stove, or portable kerosene heater to stay warm, be sure there is adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough fresh air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up in your home.

- Never use a natural gas or propane stove/oven to heat your home.
- If you are using a kerosene heater, use 1-K grade kerosene only. Never substitute with fuel oil, diesel, gasoline or yellow (regular) kerosene.
- Open a window to provide ventilation when a portable kerosene heater is in use to reduce carbon monoxide fumes inside the home.
- If you plan to cook on a barbeque grill or camp stove, remember these also produce carbon monoxide and are for outdoor use only.

***Alternate heating and cooking sources can cause fires and fire-related injuries.***

When adding fuel to a space heater, or wood to a wood stove or fireplace, wear non-flammable gloves and clothing.

- Never add fuel to a space heater when it is hot. The fuel can ignite, burning you and your home.
- Keep the heater away from objects that can burn, such as furniture, rugs or curtains. If you have a fire extinguisher, keep it nearby.
- Be careful with candles—never leave them burning if you leave the room. Keep children away from space heaters, fireplaces and wood stoves to avoid accidental burns.

***If the power has been out, perishable foods may need to be thrown away.***

During a power outage, open your refrigerator and freezer as little as possible. Eat the most perishable items first, such as leftovers, meat, poultry and food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.

Despite your best efforts, the food in your freezer may partially or completely thaw before power is restored. Foods that have completely thawed, but are still cold and have been kept cold for no longer than one or two days after thawing, may be eaten or refrozen under certain conditions:

- Fruits may be eaten or refrozen if they still taste and smell good.
- Do not eat or refreeze vegetables that have thawed completely since bacteria multiply rapidly in them.
- Meat and poultry should be thrown away if their color or odor is poor or questionable, or if they have been held at a temperature warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours.
- Fish and shellfish should not be eaten or refrozen once they have thawed.
- Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out!

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## HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS COLD WEATHER ADVICE

With an "Arctic Express" streaming into [REGION] the [NAME] Health Department is urging people to take precautions against extreme cold.

When the temperature plunges, those whose bodies can not easily regulate their temperature, such as infants and the elderly, are at increased risk of hypothermia. Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that causes the body's core temperature to drop. Warning signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion and slurred speech. Infants who are suffering from hypothermia may appear to have very low energy and bright red, cold skin.

Accidental hypothermia can occur even with temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees. The World Health Organization recommends keeping indoor temperatures between 64 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit for healthy people. In homes of people who are over 65, the thermostat should be set no lower than 68 degrees. Infants less than one year of age should never sleep in a cold room and should be provided with warm clothing and a blanket to prevent loss of body heat.

Frostbite is another cold weather concern, and is especially dangerous because it often happens with little warning. Numbness can occur so quickly that the individual, unaware of being frostbitten, may remain outside, increasing the chance of permanent damage. Older people, and those with diabetes, are especially vulnerable to frostbite because of impaired circulation.

Frostbite occurs in three stages: first degree frostbite usually causes a whitening of the skin, followed by redness, tingling and loss of feeling. In second degree frostbite the skin turns purple and blisters begin to form. Third degree frostbite, which affects those subjected to severe exposure, can lead to gangrene and amputation. Snowmobilers, skiers and ice skaters should stop frequently to check exposed areas of their body for loss of feeling and other danger signs.

To prevent frostbite and hypothermia, it is important to dress warmly in windproof clothing and to go indoors when you begin to feel cold. Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat. Fasten buttons or zippers and tighten drawstrings securely. Don't forget gloves, mittens and a hat that covers the ears. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven to reduce body heat loss caused by wind. As the speed of wind increases, it can carry heat away from the body faster. In high wind conditions, cold weather-related health problems are much more likely.

Since cold weather puts an extra burden on the heart, if you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise healthy adults should remember that their bodies already are working overtime just to stay warm and dress appropriately; and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.

Also keep in mind that alcoholic beverages cause the body to lose heat more rapidly. If you will be spending time outside, do not ignore shivering – it is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to quickly return indoors.

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## **HEALTH DEPARTMENT URGES PRECAUTIONS AGAINST EXTREME COLD WEATHER**

In the wake of recent sub-freezing temperatures in [REGION] and a continued frigid forecast, the [NAME] Health Department is urging people to take precautions.

In extreme cold conditions, some people, such as infants and the elderly whose bodies can not easily regulate their temperature are at increased risk for hypothermia. Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that causes the body's core temperature to drop. Warning signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion and slurred speech. Infants who are suffering from hypothermia may appear to have very low energy and bright red, cold skin.

Accidental hypothermia can occur even with temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees. The World Health Organization recommends keeping indoor temperatures between 64 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit for healthy people. In homes of people who are over 65, the thermostat should be set no lower than 68 degrees. Infants less than one year of age should never sleep in a cold room and should be provided with warm clothing and a blanket to prevent loss of body heat.

Frostbite is another cold weather concern, and is especially dangerous because it often happens with little warning. Numbness can occur so quickly that the individual, unaware of being frostbitten, may remain outside, increasing the chance of permanent damage. Older persons, and those with diabetes, are especially vulnerable to frostbite because of impaired circulation.

Frostbite occurs in three stages: first degree frostbite usually causes a whitening of the skin, followed by redness, tingling and loss of feeling. In second degree frostbite the skin turns purple and blisters begin to form. Third degree frostbite, which can affect those exposed to severe cold, can lead to gangrene and amputation. Skiers, ice skaters, hikers and snowmobilers should stop frequently to check exposed areas of their body for loss of feeling and other danger signs.

To prevent frostbite and hypothermia, it is important to dress warmly in wind-proof clothing and to go indoors when you begin to feel cold. Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat. Fasten buttons or zippers and tighten drawstrings securely.

Don't forget gloves, mittens and a hat that covers the ears. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven to reduce body heat loss caused by wind. As the speed of wind increases, it can carry heat away from the body faster. In high wind conditions, cold weather-related health problems are much more likely.

Since cold weather puts an extra burden on the heart, if you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember that their bodies already are working overtime just to stay warm and dress appropriately, and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores. If you will be spending time outside, do not ignore shivering. It is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to quickly return indoors.

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## **HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS COLD WEATHER ADVICE (WITH CARBON MONOXIDE INFORMATION)**

With National Weather Service reports forecasting extremely cold temperatures across the region, and with temperatures expected to decrease to well-below zero degrees Fahrenheit, Health Commissioner [NAME], is urging people to take precautions against extreme cold.

“With temperatures expected to dramatically plummet over the next few days, we are stressing that all residents take precautions to avoid exposure to extremely cold conditions which can lead to hypothermia,” [NAME] said. “Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that causes the body’s core temperature to drop. Warning signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion and slurred speech. Infants who are suffering from hypothermia may appear to have very low energy and bright red, cold skin.”

Accidental hypothermia can occur even with temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. The World Health Organization recommends keeping indoor temperatures between 64 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit for healthy people. People who are over 65, should set their home thermostat no lower than 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Infants less than one year of age should never sleep in a cold room and should be provided with warm clothing and a blanket to prevent loss of body heat.

Frostbite is another cold weather concern, and is especially dangerous because it often happens with little warning. Numbness can occur so quickly that the individual, unaware of being frostbitten, may remain outside, increasing the chance of permanent damage. Older persons, and those with diabetes, are especially vulnerable to frostbite because of impaired circulation.

Frostbite occurs in three stages: first degree frostbite usually causes a whitening of the skin, followed by redness, tingling and loss of feeling. In second degree frostbite the skin turns purple and blisters begin to form. Third degree frostbite, which affects those subjected to severe exposure, can lead to gangrene and amputation. Snowmobilers, skiers and ice skaters should stop frequently to check exposed areas of their body for loss of feeling and other danger signs.

To prevent frostbite and hypothermia, it is important to dress warmly in windproof clothing and to go indoors when you begin to feel cold. Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat. Fasten buttons or zippers and tighten drawstrings securely. Don’t forget gloves, mittens and a hat that covers the ears. Be aware of the effects of wind chill. As the speed of wind increases, it can carry heat away from the body faster. In high wind conditions, cold weather-related health problems are much more likely. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven to reduce body heat loss caused by wind.

Since cold weather puts an extra burden on the heart, if you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor’s orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember that their bodies already are working overtime just to stay warm and dress appropriately, and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.



Keep in mind that alcoholic beverages cause the body to lose heat more rapidly. If you will be spending time outside, do not ignore shivering - it is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to quickly return indoors.

As temperatures remain extremely low and cold weather grips the region, it is important that residents also take important precautions to avoid exposure to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, poisonous gas that is produced as a result of incomplete burning of carbon based fuels. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to the flu but do not include a fever. At lower levels of exposure, a person may experience a headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and shortness of breath. Exposure to very high levels of carbon monoxide can result in loss of consciousness, brain damage, and even death. All homes in New York State must have a carbon monoxide alarm and the batteries should be replaced twice a year. If the alarm sounds, you should get out of the building.

Individuals who plan on using an alternative source of heat during extended power outages, such as a non-electric space heater, wood stove or fireplace, be sure to have adequate ventilation to the outside to prevent build-up of carbon monoxide inside your home. Never use a natural gas or propane stove or oven to heat your home. If you are using a generator as a temporary source of power, remember that the motor emits carbon monoxide. Never operate a generator indoors. Portable generators should be placed outside, away and downwind from windows and doors of any building.

In addition, when using alternative heat from a space heater, wood stove or fireplace, individuals should take precautions when handling or maintaining the heating source by using protective wear such as non-flammable gloves and clothing. Adults must make sure that children and potentially flammable objects are kept a safe distance from the heating source and have an operable fire extinguisher available. Residents should install both carbon monoxide alarms and fire detectors throughout the home and test them periodically.

To keep water pipes from freezing in the home:

- Let faucets drip a little to avoid freezing;
- Open cabinet doors to allow more heat to get to un-insulated pipes under a sink or appliance near an outer wall; and
- Make sure heat is left on and set no lower than 55 degrees.

Individuals and their families should be knowledgeable on how to shut off the water source to the home in the event that the pipes freeze and burst. This action will stop the water flow and help minimize the damage to the home. Residents who experience frozen or burst water pipes should contact a plumber and their insurance agent. Never try to thaw a pipe with an open flame or torch and be aware of the potential for electric shock in and around standing water.

If someone you know - a friend, neighbor or relative - is elderly or dependent on life-sustaining or health-related equipment such as a ventilator, respirator or oxygen concentrator, check on them on a regular basis to ensure their safety and well-being.

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## **OFFICIALS WARN OF HEALTH THREATS FROM HIGH HEAT**

[CITY], NY [DATE]—As communities across New York State face sweltering weather and a heat index in the triple digits, health officials urge awareness of the warning signs of heat exhaustion heat stroke. Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people, people with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment. If you know of older individuals who may be affected by the heat, take a moment to check on how they are coping and find out if they need help.

### **WARNING SIGNS OF HEAT EXHAUSTION VARY BUT MAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:**

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin: may be cool and moist
- Pulse rate: fast and weak
- Breathing: fast and shallow

### **WHAT TO DO IF HEAT EXHAUSTION IS SUSPECTED:**

Cooling measures that may be effective include the following:

- Drinking cool, nonalcoholic beverages, as directed by your physician
- Resting in an air-conditioned environment
- Taking a cool shower, bath or sponge bath
- Wearing lightweight clothing
- Preventing sun burn, which damages the skin's ability to dissipate heat by wearing sunscreen of 30 SPF.

If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention immediately if any of the following occurs:

- Symptoms are severe
- The victim has heart problems or high blood pressure

Otherwise, help the victim to cool off and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour. If you or someone you know is in danger of heat related illness, call [TELEPHONE NUMBER] to find out if cooling stations have been set up nearby, or visit [LOCAL WEBSITE], [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov) or [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us).

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## **THUNDERSTORMS, TORNADOES IN THE FORECAST? OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO BE AWARE, PREPARED!**

[CITY], NY [DATE] – Local health and emergency management officials remind [NAME OF COUNTY] residents that thunderstorms can cause damaging hail and heavy winds, and sometimes even spawn tornadoes. When there are thunderstorms in your area, turn on your radio or TV to get the latest emergency information from local authorities. Listen for announcements of a tornado watch or tornado warning. "Better yet," [NAME/TITLE] said, "invest in a weather radio that can be especially programmed for your area. That way you'll be alerted and be able to take precautions if a dangerous storm heads your way while you are asleep."

Officials urge residents to know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning, and what to do during each. A tornado watch is issued when weather conditions favor the formation of tornadoes, for example, during a severe thunderstorm. During a tornado watch:

- Stay tuned to local radio and TV stations or a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio for further weather information.
- Watch the weather and be prepared to take shelter immediately if conditions worsen.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado funnel is sighted or indicated by weather radar. You should take shelter immediately. Tornadoes often accompany thunderstorms, so pay close attention to changing weather conditions when there is a severe thunderstorm watch or warning.

If you are inside and a tornado warning is issued, go to an interior room with no glass on the lowest level of the building you are in. If you're caught outdoors during a tornado, don't try to outrun it in your car. A tornado can change directions quickly. You should seek shelter indoors. If that isn't possible, get out of your car and duck down in the lowest spot you can find, such as a ditch or gully.

A severe thunderstorm watch means severe thunderstorms are possible in your area. A severe thunderstorm warning means severe thunderstorms are occurring in your area.

To be prepared for severe weather, keep fresh batteries and a battery-powered radio or TV on hand. Electrical power is often interrupted during thunderstorms—just when information about weather warnings is most needed.

### **Important Measures to Take in Advance**

Spend a few minutes with your family to develop a tornado emergency plan. Then put it into action:

- Sketch a floor plan of where you live, or walk through each room and discuss where and how to seek shelter.
- Find a second way to exit from each room or area. If you need special equipment, such as a rope ladder, mark where it is located.
- Make sure everyone understands the siren warning system, if there's such a system in your area.
- Mark where your first-aid kit and fire extinguishers are located.
- Mark where the utility switches or valves are located so they can be turned off—if time permits—in an emergency.
- Teach your family how to administer basic first aid, how to use a fire extinguisher, and how and when to turn off water, gas, and electricity in your home.
- Learn the emergency dismissal policy for your child's school.
- Make sure your children know:
  - What a tornado is
  - What tornado watches and warnings are
  - What county they live in (warnings are issued by county)
  - How to take shelter, whether at home or at school.

### **Extra Measures for People with Special Needs**

If you have a medical condition that limits your ability to respond to an emergency, write down your specific needs, limitations, capabilities, and medications. Keep this list near you always—perhaps in your purse or wallet.

- Find someone nearby (a spouse, roommate, friend, neighbor, relative, or co-worker) who will agree to assist you in case of an emergency. Give him or her a copy of your list. You may also want to provide a spare key to your home, or directions to find a key.
- Keep aware of weather conditions through whatever means are accessible to you. Some options are closed captioning or scrolled warnings on TV, radio bulletins, or call-in weather information lines.

### **Practicing an Emergency Plan**

A plan that exists on paper but is never practiced will provide little benefit. Conduct drills and ask questions to make sure your family remembers information on storm safety, particularly how to recognize hazardous weather conditions and how to take shelter. Don't count on your memory in an emergency! A stressful situation can make us forget even simple things. Make a list of important information in advance. Include these items on your list:

- Important telephone numbers, such as emergency (police and fire), paramedics, and medical centers.
- Important medical information (for example, allergies, regular medications, and brief medical history).
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of your insurance agents, including policy types and numbers.
- Telephone numbers of the electric, gas, and water companies.
- Names and telephone numbers of neighbors.

- Name and telephone number of your landlord or property manager, if applicable.
- Year, model, license, and identification numbers of your vehicles (automobiles, boats, and RVs).
- Telephone number of your bank's or credit union, and your account numbers.
- Radio and television broadcast stations to tune to for emergency broadcast information.

### **Protect Important Documents**

Keep important paperwork you will need in a waterproof or fireproof safe, or make copies and keep original documents (such as your will) with your attorney. These include:

- Birth certificates
- Ownership certificates (autos, boats, etc.)
- Social security cards
- Insurance policies
- Will
- Household contents inventory:
  - List of contents of household furniture and appliances; include serial numbers, if applicable
  - Photographs or videotape of contents of every room
  - Photographs of items of high values, such as jewelry, paintings, collection items.

Although no amount of preparation will eliminate every risk after a heavy windstorm, there are some things you can do that can help. Start by identifying possible problem areas around your home and reducing household hazards.

Inspect your home for possible hazards, including the following:

- Are walls securely bolted to the foundation?
- Are wall studs attached to the roof rafters with metal hurricane clips, not nails?
- Do you know where and how to shut off utilities at the main switches or valves?
- Are chairs or beds away from windows, mirrors, or large pictures?
- Are heavy items stored on lower shelves no more than 30 inches high?
- Are poisons, solvents, or toxic materials stored safely in a sturdy well ventilated, locked cabinet, away from emergency food and supplies?
- Are there large, unsecured items that might topple over or fall? If so,
  - Secure your large appliances, especially your water heater, with flexible cable, braided wire, or metal strapping.
  - Identify top-heavy, free-standing furniture, such as bookcases and china cabinets that could topple over and secure them to the wall using "L" brackets, corner brackets, or aluminum molding.
  - Alternatively, use may use eyebolts, to secure items located a short distance from a wall.

For more information, visit [LOCAL WEBSITE ADDRESS], [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) , [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov) , or call [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

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**STATEMENT FROM [NAME OF OFFICIAL] IN AFTERMATH OF  
SUSPECTED TORNADO THAT STRUCK [AREA]**

[CITY,] NY, [DATE] – [NAME OF COUNTY] Emergency management and health officials have issued the following advice for residents who live in areas hit today by heavy winds and possibly even tornadoes:

DO NOT USE matches, lighters, or appliances, or operate light switches until you are sure there are no gas leaks. Sparks from electrical switches could ignite gas and cause an explosion.

If you smell the odor of gas or if you notice a large consumption of gas being registered on the gas meter, shut off the gas immediately. First, find the main shut-off valve located on a pipe next to the gas meter. Use an adjustable wrench to turn the valve to the “off” position.

If there is considerable storm damage in your area, shut off the electricity. Sparks from electrical switches could ignite leaking gas and cause an explosion.

If you need to turn off water, you can do so at the main meter, which controls the water flow to the entire property, or at the water main leading into the home. If you may need an emergency source of fresh water, it is better to shut off your water here, because it will conserve the water in your water heater.

If you must leave your home, be watchful for downed power lines, damaged tree limbs and flooded areas in roads or along streams and rivers that can pose a hazard. Do not attempt to cross a stream or pool of water unless they are certain that the water will not be over your knees, or above the middle of the car’s wheels, all the way across.

Use a wind-up or battery operated radio or television to stay tuned to news reports for further information, or, call [telephone number].

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## **OFFICIALS URGE HURRICANE READINESS, WARN OF “RARE BUT REAL” RISK**

[CITY,] NY, [DATE] –You don’t need to live near the ocean to feel the impact of a hurricane. All of New York State is vulnerable to effects of hurricanes in Atlantic coastal areas and from extensive flooding if a storm moves inland.

A hurricane is one of the deadliest forces of nature, known to generate high winds, torrential rains and tornadoes, and capable of causing death, serious injury and costly property damage. [NAME /TITLE OF OFFICIAL] says: “The Atlantic hurricane season begins each year in June and continues through November. While we do not often take a direct hit from a hurricane in our state, it has happened before and will again, with potentially devastating effects. The risk is rare, but real.”

Here are some steps you can take now to be prepared for a hurricane:

- Have plenty of non-perishable food and water supplies on hand. Make sure battery-operated radios and flashlights are available and have an ample supply of batteries. You can also purchase hand-cranked flashlights and radios which do not need batteries. Have a first aid kit available and make sure there is adequate supply of medicines on hand for those who require it.
- Know how to contact all family members at all times. Identify an out-of-town friend or family member to be the “emergency family contact.” Then make certain all family members have that number. Designate a family emergency meeting place, where the family can meet in case you can’t go home.
- Pay particular attention to relatives with special needs, small children and pets. Know where to relocate pets during a storm because most shelters will not allow pets. Shelters will only accept “service animals” that assist people with disabilities.
- Prepare an emergency phone list of people and organizations that may need to be called. Include children’s schools, doctors, child/senior care providers, and insurance agents.
- Know the local radio and television stations that will provide up-to-date official information during a storm emergency. Follow the news and emergency broadcasts.
- Find out what emergency plans are in place in your community and how you will be notified in the event of an emergency.
- Know the hurricane risks in your area and learn the storm surge history and elevation of your area.
- Store important documents such as insurance policies, medical records, bank account numbers, social security cards, etc., in waterproof containers. Also have cash (in small bills), checkbook credit and ATM cards readily available.

If living in a coastal area:

- Learn the safe routes inland and become familiar with local evacuation and sheltering plans.
- Obtain and store materials, such as plywood, necessary to properly secure windows, doors and other openings.

[NAME /TITLE OF OFFICIAL] says “If a storm happens, you can be ready. We can’t control the force of nature, but we can work together to minimize its impact.”

For more information, visit [LOCAL WEBSITE ADDRESS], [www.semo.state.ny.us](http://www.semo.state.ny.us) , [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov) , or call [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

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