



# Winter Storms

NOAA NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

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## Heavy Snow and Blizzards

Heavy snow can immobilize a region and paralyze a city, stranding commuters, closing airports, stopping the flow of supplies, and disrupting emergency and medical services. Accumulations of snow can cause roofs to collapse and knock down trees and power lines. Homes and farms may be isolated for days and unprotected livestock may be lost. The cost of snow removal, repairing damage, and the loss of business can have severe economic impacts on a community.

### Did you know...

During a **blizzard**, winds over 35 mph cause blowing snow and dangerously low visibility below ¼ mile.



View out the window



Same view during a blizzard

## Ice Storms

Significant ice accumulation can topple trees, utility poles, and communication towers. Communication and power disruptions may last for days while extensive damage is repaired. Even a light coating of ice can pose extreme danger to both motorists and pedestrians. Bridges are particularly hazardous because they freeze before other surfaces.



## Extreme Cold

Extreme cold varies in different parts of the country. In the southern U.S., near freezing temperatures are considered extreme cold, while in the northern states it means temperatures or wind chills well below zero. Freezing temperatures can cause severe damage to citrus fruit crops and other vegetation. Pipes may freeze and burst in homes that poorly insulated or without heat. Exposure to cold can cause frostbite or hypothermia and become life-threatening, especially for infants and the elderly.

**Frostbite** is damage to body tissue caused by that tissue being frozen.

**Warning signs:** Loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, or the tip of the nose

**Take action!** Get immediate medical help! If you must wait for help, slowly re-warm affected areas. However, if the person is also showing signs of hypothermia, warm the body core before the extremities.

**Hypothermia** occurs when the body temperature drops below 95°F.

**Warning signs:** Uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and/or apparent exhaustion

**Take Action!** Immediately seek medical care! Slowly begin warming the person, *warming the body core first*. (Warming the arms and legs drives cold blood toward the heart and can lead to heart failure.) Get the person into dry clothing and wrap in a warm blanket, covering the head and neck. Do **not** give the person alcohol, drugs, or any hot beverage or food.

## Before the storm strikes...

**At home and work**, the primary concerns are loss of heat, power, and communications and a shortage of supplies if storm conditions continue for more than a day. Have available:

- \* Flashlight and extra batteries
- \* Battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio All-Hazards
- \* Extra food and water, medicine, and baby items for at least 3 days
- \* First-aid supplies
- \* Emergency heat source and heating fuel
- \* Fire extinguisher, smoke detector



**In vehicles**, it is critical to be prepared should you become stranded.

- \* Fully check and winterize your vehicle before the winter season begins.
- \* Check weather forecasts frequently and plan your travel to avoid the storm.
- \* Carry a winter storm survival kit.
- \* Keep your gas tank near full.
- \* Avoid traveling alone.
- \* Let someone know your timetable.
- \* Carry a cell phone and make sure it is charged.



**Animals suffer, too!**

- \* Make sure pets and livestock have plenty of food, water, and shelter.

## If you're caught by a winter storm...

**In a Vehicle...**

- \* Stay in the vehicle: People become quickly disoriented in wind-driven snow and cold.
- \* Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked. Run the motor about 10 minutes each hour for heat. Open the window slightly for fresh air and to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- \* Be visible to rescuers.
- \* Turn on the dome light at night when running the engine.
- \* After snow stops falling, raise the hood to indicate you need help.
- \* Occasionally move your arms, legs, fingers, and toes vigorously to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.



**Outside...**

- \* Find shelter!
- \* Try to stay dry.
- \* Cover all exposed body parts.
- \* If shelter is not available, build a lean-to, windbreak, or snow cave for protection from the wind. Build a fire for heat and to attract attention, placing rocks around it to absorb and reflect heat.
- \* Melt snow for drinking water. (Eating snow without melting will lower your body temperature.)

**On the web:**

National Weather Service..... [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)  
 Red Cross Preparedness..... [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)