Winter Safety

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Canadian winters are renowned for their breathtaking landscapes and playful, enchanting wonderlands but when we experience an ice storm or a tremendous amount of blowing and drifting snow our security and safety are precarious at best – if not unpredictable. Winter storms can disrupt your electrical supply, play havoc in communicating with your children and transportation systems can be down or operating at a snail’s pace. If you are across town and unable to pick up your children after school, who will? What's your plan? Are your children aware of your plan? If there is a power failure during a winter storm and your home is heated with electricity, what will you do? The better prepared you are; the more security you can offer your family. Let's get started!

Children's Health and Safety Association highly recommends that you create an Emergency Plan so that everyone in your family understands what to do in case of adverse situations. Being prepared is the key factor in reducing the stress level during an emergency. Here are some guidelines and safety tips.
**Emergency Plan**

Every family should have an 'Emergency Plan'. Review, discuss and ensure that your family members understand your emergency plan should a winter storm occur. It's a good idea to practice different scenarios and ask your children questions so that you can determine how much they understand and therefore, repeat and reinforce areas they had difficulty in comprehending. If you do not have an Emergency Plan, please click on Emergency Management Ontario. Emergency Management websites for all remaining provinces and territories are listed at the end of this article.

Determine the method of communication with your family, i.e. text messaging, other social media or long distance call. Calling locally could prove to be difficult due to network and tower damage.

Select two out-of-town contacts you and your family can communicate with in order to connect and share information. Ensure that your children know how to text messages. Plan for each family member to call or text the same out-of-town contacts in the event of an emergency. If you are new to Canada and don't have out-of-town contacts make arrangements through friends, cultural associations or local community organizations.

Maintain an updated list of emergency numbers and make sure all members of your family know where the list can be easily located. Teach your children when and how to dial 9-1-1 and other key numbers they may need to call. Consider including the telephone contacts listed below:

- 9-1-1 (where available)
- Police
- Fire
- Parent contact numbers – work and cell
- Family Doctor
- Telehealth
- Poison control
- Family & friends who can lend support in a crisis
- Insurance contact
- Utility companies

Always keep your communications devices fully charged.

If you need to evacuate your home, select two safe locations such as a nearby library or community centre. The other location should be farther away, outside your neighbourhood, in case the emergency affects a larger expanse.

Plan how you will travel to the safe location if evacuation is required or advised. Have an emergency survival kit ready to take with you.

If you have pets, pre-arrange to have someone take care of them (a relative or friend's home, or pet boarding facility) in case of an emergency. Often, only service animals are allowed at public shelters.

Make sure everyone in your family knows how to exit your home safely, i.e. a main exit and a secondary exit should the first one not be unavailable. If you live in a high-rise and have special
needs, talk to your building manager or neighbours to make arrangements in the event of an emergency.

Inquire at your workplace and your child’s school or daycare centre about their emergency plan and how family will be contacted should it be deemed necessary. Make sure you keep all relevant contact information up to date and ensure that people who are designated to pick up your children are familiar with your emergency plan.

It’s a good idea to find out what type of authorization the school and daycare centre require to release your children to a designated person if you can’t pick your children up yourself.

If your or your children have special needs establish a personal support network of friends, relatives, health care providers, co-workers and neighbours who can assist you.

Be sure to include extra medication and supplies in your emergency kit including the medical history, copies of prescriptions, and information denoting key health-care contacts. You may not have access to a pharmacy immediately after an emergency has occurred. It is also a good idea to teach other people about any special needs, such as how to use medical equipment or administer medicine.

Be considerate and thoughtful. Think of your neighbours. Identify anyone who may need assistance during an emergency and discuss a plan with them and other neighbours. It’s also a good idea to help them prepare a survival kit. Arrange with your neighbours to check in on that person during an emergency.

To learn more about emergency planning for disability and special needs, consult the guide for people with disabilities/special needs.

**Emergency Survival Kit**

Place your Emergency Survival Kit in a common place so that it can be easily obtained by all members of your family. The Emergency Survival Kit should contain everything you and your family require to remain self-sufficient for at least three days immediately following an emergency. Make sure your survival kit is easy to carry, for example, a backpack, duffel bag or suitcase with wheels. Here is a list of some essentials.

- Food - non-perishable and easy-to-prepare items for 3 days such as canned foods that contain soups, stews, baked beans, pasta, meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, fruits, crackers and biscuits, honey, peanut butter, syrup, jam, salt and pepper, sugar, and instant tea and coffee.
- Manual can opener and bottle opener
- Bottled water (4 litres per person for each day)
- Medications
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Radio - crank or battery
- First-aid kit including instruction manual for emergencies
- Candles and matches/lighter
- Hand sanitizer or moist towelettes
- Important documents, i.e. identification, contact lists, copies of prescriptions, etc.
- Extra car keys and home keys
- Cash and change for pay phones
- Whistle in case you need to attract someone's attention
- Zip-lock bag (to keep things dry)
- Plastic garbage bags for personal sanitation
- Knives, forks, and spoons
- Disposable cups and plates

Children and Animals

- Diapers, formula, bottles and baby food
- Comfort items, extra warm clothes and blankets
- Prescriptions and medications
- Medical supplies and equipment
- Pet food and supplies

Other Items

- Extra set of clothes and shoes for each family member
- Sleeping bags and blankets
- Personal items (soap, toothpaste, shampoo, comb, toilet paper and other toiletries)
- Playing cards, travel games, other activities for children
- Safety gloves
- Basic tools such as hammer, pliers, wrench, screwdrivers and fasteners
- Small fuel driven stove and fuel
✓ Pack the contents of your kit in an easy-to-carry bag or a case on wheels.
✓ Store your 'Emergency Survival Kit' in a place that is accessible to all members of your family, and ensure that everyone is aware of its location.
✓ Your water supply should sustain your drinking water as well as food preparation, hygiene and dishwashing.
✓ It is highly recommended that you check and refresh your 'Emergency Survival Kit' twice a year, i.e. when the clocks shift to and from daylight savings time.
✓ Check all expiry dates and replace food and water with a fresh supply.
✓ Check batteries and replace as required.
✓ Keep your cell phone or mobile device fully charged.
✓ Once a year, review your Emergency Plan with the entire family.

**Car Emergency Survival Kit**

If you have a car, prepare a smaller Emergency Kit comprised of the following suggested items. Don't wait for an emergency to happen. Protect yourself and your family in the event of an emergency.

- shovel, scraper and snowbrush
- sand, salt or kitty litter
- traction mats
- tow rope and booster (jumper) cables
- compass
- cloth or roll of paper towels
- warning light and road flares
- whistle
- extra clothing and footwear
- emergency food pack such as energy bars and other food that won't spoil
- water
- axe or hatchet
- road maps
- matches and a 'survival' candle in a deep can (to warm hands, heat a drink or use as an emergency light)
- fire extinguisher
- flashlight that is wind up or battery powered
- first-aid kit with seatbelt cutter
- blanket (special "survival blankets are best"
- list of emergency contact telephone numbers
- antifreeze and windshield washer fluid
**Power Failure Safety Tips**

- Turn the thermostat(s) down to minimum and turn off all appliances, electronic equipment and tools to prevent injury, damage to equipment and fire. Power can be restored more easily when the system is not overloaded.

- Use proper candleholders. Never leave lit candles unattended.

- Don’t use charcoal or gas barbecues, camping heating equipment or home generators indoors.

- Home generators are handy for backup electricity in case of an outage, but you should be aware of the hazards. To operate a generator safely, follow the manufacturer’s instructions, and always:
  1. Ensure that the generator is operated outdoors in well-ventilated conditions and away from doors or windows.
  2. Connect lights and appliances directly to the generator. If extension cords must be used, ensure they are properly rated cords approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Direct installation of a generator to an existing electrical system should only be done by a qualified technician.

- Make sure your heating equipment and chimneys are cleaned and inspected once a year - especially before winter arrives.

- Local radio and television stations offer weather reports and emergency information. Authorities will not ask you to leave your home unless they have a reason to believe you are in danger. If they advise a specific travel route, please follow their instructions. If you are planning to leave your house, contact your out-of-town contacts and tell them where you are going along with your estimated time of arrival.

- If possible, stay in doors. If you must go outside, dress in several layers and lightweight clothing to avoid serious winter related injuries. Mittens, gloves, hats and scarves are highly recommended.

- Wear winter boots that are waterproof and well insulated so your feet will stay dry and warm. Boots with good tread on the soles will allow you to maintain your footing on ice and snow.

- When shovelling snow avoid over exertion by taking frequent breaks.
Safety Tips for Infants

Infants lose body heat more easily than adults and as well, they can’t make enough body heat by shivering.

- Infants less than one year old should never sleep in a cold room.
- Provide warm clothing and blankets for infants and maintain a warm indoor temperature. If the temperature cannot be maintained, make temporary arrangements to stay elsewhere.
- In an emergency, you can keep your baby warm using your own body but if you take your baby in bed with you, please take precautions to prevent rolling on the baby.
- Pillows and other soft bedding can present a risk of smothering so remove them from the area near the baby – especially the face.

Frostbite

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and colour in affected areas – especially the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes and it can permanently damage the body and in severe cases, lead to amputation.

If you are outside for a prolonged period of time during the cold weather months perform regular checks for frostbite. At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin because frostbite may be setting in. A white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy and numbness are the first indications of frostbite. A victim is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissue is numb.

What should I do if I see someone with warning signs of frostbite?

If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical attention. Frostbite and hypothermia both result from exposure to the elements therefore it is highly recommended that you first determine whether the victim shows signs of hypothermia (read description below) which is a more serious medical condition and requires immediate medical assistance.
To assist frostbite victims proceed as follows:

- Place the victim in a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes because this will increases the damage.
- Immerse the affected area in warm not hot water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).
- You can also warm the affected area using body heat, i.e. the heat from your armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers.
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage. This can cause more damage.
- Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace or radiator for warming because the affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

Please Note: The above noted procedures were referenced from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and are not substitutes for proper medical care. Hypothermia requires immediate medical assistance and frostbite should be evaluated by a health care provider. We recommend that you take a first aid and emergency resuscitation (CPR) course to prepare for cold-weather health situations. Knowing what to do is an important part of protecting your family's health and the health of others.

Do you know what to do if you are stranded in a car during a winter storm?

- Secure a cloth to your window as a signal to emergency crew and rescuers. Roll down a window, place a light, brightly coloured cloth (like a scarf) through the window and then roll up the window to clamp it in place. The item will flap around in the wind like a flag and draw attention to your stranded vehicle. In fact, you can stick a flag or sports banner outside your window.
- Locate and move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger seating area.
- Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets or newspapers.
- Stay awake. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems.
- Run the car motor and heater for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in some air.
- Ensure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep moving your arms and legs to improve your circulation and stay warm.
- Do not eat snow because it will lower your body temperature.
Whether you are an adult or child, the best clothing for cold weather is:

- Double layered hat that covers your ears
- Scarf or knit mask that covers your face and mouth
- Long sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- Double layered mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- Water-resistant coat and shoes
- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing

Ensure that the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven and preferably wind resistant to reduce the loss of body heat.

Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton.

Wet clothing chills the body rapidly so in all circumstances try to stay dry.

Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm.

Avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing, fuelling your car or when using a snow blower. When these products get in contact with the skin, they greatly increase heat loss from the body.

**Do not ignore shivering.** It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a strong signal to return indoors.

**Hypothermia**

When exposed to cold temperatures over a prolonged period of time your body loses heat faster than it can produce which can result in hypothermia, or an abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move normally which makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know what is happening and therefore unable to do anything about it.

Hypothermia occurs most commonly at very cold temperatures, but can occur at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.
Who is most at risk for hypothermia?

- elderly people with inadequate food, clothing, or heating
- babies sleeping in cold bedrooms
- children left unattended
- adults under the influence of alcohol
- mentally ill individuals
- people who remain outdoors for long periods of time, i.e. homeless people, hikers, etc.

What are the warning signs for hypothermia?

**Adults:**

- shivering/exhaustion
- confusion/fumbling hands
- memory loss/slurred speech
- drowsiness

**Infants:**

- bright red, cold skin
- very low energy

What should I do if I see someone with warning signs of hypothermia?

If you suspect the person has signs of hypothermia, take his/her temperature. If it is below 95°F (35°C), the situation is an emergency so make sure the person receives medical attention immediately. If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, as follows:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing.
- Warm the centre of the body first - chest, neck, head, and groin using an electric blanket, if available or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but DO NOT give alcoholic beverages. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After the body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket including the head and neck.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.

A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and not seem to have a pulse or breathing. In this case:

- Handle the victim gently
- Get emergency assistance immediately
- Provide CPR even if the victim appears dead
Continue providing CPR while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical assistance becomes available.
Hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated in some cases.

After the Storm

Severe winter storms or any other type of emergency will affect your children in a number of ways. More than likely, they will be afraid that the event will reoccur and they will be separated from their family.

- Comfort and reassure your children. Make them feel safe and secure.
- Be honest about the situation but gentle in your delivery.
- Encourage your children to talk about the disaster and to ask questions.
- Give them tasks to do. Keep them occupied.
- Keep your children with you at all times. During emergencies, family needs to stay together.

Reminder

It's a good idea to keep a copy of your Emergency Plan in your car, at your office and with your Emergency Kit. Keep the original copy in your home where it is accessible by all members of your family.

If You Require Additional Information on Preparedness:

Please contact your local Red Cross Office at feedback@redcross.ca by email or visit www.redcross.ca on the Internet. For general information or to order self-help brochures, please contact:

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada
Communications Division
340 Laurier Ave. West, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P8

Telephone: (613) 991-2800
Toll-free: 1-800-830-3118
Fax: (613) 998-9589
E-mail: communications@psepc.gc.ca
Internet: www.psepc.gc.ca

Please contact your provincial/territorial Emergency Management Organization (EMO) for regional or local information on emergency preparedness.

Newfoundland and Labrador
Emergency Measures Organization
Telephone: (709) 729-3703
Fax: (709) 729-3857
Prince Edward Island
Emergency Measures Organization
Telephone: (902) 888-8050
Fax: (902) 888-8054

Nova Scotia
Emergency Measures Organization
Telephone: (902) 424-5620
Fax: (902) 424-5376

New Brunswick
Emergency Measures Organization
Telephone: (506) 453-2133
Toll-free: (800) 561-4034
Fax: (506) 453-5513

Québec
Direction générale de la sécurité civile et de la sécurité incendie
Telephone: (418) 646-7950
Fax: (418) 646-5427
Toll-free Emergency Number: 1-866-776-8345
Emergency Number: (418) 643-3256
Or one of these regional offices:
• Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie – Îles-de-la-Madeleine: (418) 727-3589
• Saguenay – Lac-St-Jean – Côte-Nord: (418) 695-7872
• Capitale Nationale – Chaudière – Appalaches – Nunavik: (418) 643-3244
• Mauricie – Centre-du-Québec: (819) 371-6703
• Montréal – Laval – Laurentides – Lanaudière: (514) 873-1300
• Montérégie – Estrie: (514) 873-1324
• Outaouais – Abitibi – Témiscamingue – Nord-du-Québec: (819) 772-3737

Ontario
Emergency Management Ontario
Telephone: (416) 212-3468
Fax: (416) 212-3498

Manitoba
Emergency Measures Organization
Telephone: (204) 945-4772
Toll-free: 1-888-826-8298
Fax: (204) 945-4620

Saskatchewan
Saskatchewan Emergency Planning
Telephone: (306) 787-9563
Fax: (306) 787-1694
Alberta
Emergency Management Alberta
Telephone: (780) 422-9000
Toll-free in Alberta, dial 310-0000-780-422-9000
Fax: (780) 422-1549

British Columbia
Emergency Management BC
Telephone: (250) 952-4913
Fax: (250) 952-4888

Emergency Management for all Provinces and Territories

British Columbia - Emergency Management BC

Alberta - Emergency Management Alberta

Saskatchewan - SaskEMO

Manitoba - Emergency Measures Organization (EMO)

Ontario - Emergency Management Ontario

Québec - Emergency Preparedness

New Brunswick - Emergency Measures Organization

Nova Scotia - Emergency Management Office

Prince Edward Island - Emergency Measures Organization

Newfoundland and Labrador - Emergency Measures Organization

Northwest Territories - Emergency Measures Organization

Yukon - Emergency Measures Organization

Nunavut - Nunavut Emergency Management

Resources and References

Ice Safety
**Emergency Procedures for Infants and Toddlers**

**Emergency Management Ontario** – Create your own Emergency Preparedness Action Plan for your family and obtain an extensive amount of information on diverse emergencies. This is an excellent website!

**CDC – Winter Weather – Emergency Preparedness and Response**