

Let's Talk About Winter Safety

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by Carrie Peterson, LCPC

Winter is a beautiful time of year. Nature is asleep, the air is crisp and clear, and nothing compares to a landscape covered in new snow. Being inside by the fire with a good book or cooking a hearty warm meal comes to mind. But, winter is not a time to just stay indoors and wait for spring. Many of us have to go outside daily for work or chores, there's a wonderland of winter activities and, certainly, someone may have to shovel the driveway. All of us need to take precautions to be safe. Accidents can happen easily and, before you know it, you or a family member could be on your way to the emergency room.

Some illnesses are more common when the weather turns cold. Because people stay indoors and are exposed to more airborne germs, respiratory ailments like the flu virus are more prevalent. One way to stay healthy while cooped up is to be sure that your family washes hands regularly, especially after handling toys, coughing or blowing a runny nose.

When going out to shovel the snow, take care. Shoveling is strenuous work and suddenly working that hard, if you're generally sedentary, can be dangerous. Dress in layers so that if the outer layer gets wet, it can be peeled away to a dryer layer. Avoid cotton clothing because it won't keep you very warm. Stick with wool or other fabrics that wick away dampness.

If going on a road trip in winter, pack a first-aid kit, extra blankets and gloves in the car.

Snowmobiling is very popular and the machines go faster than ever. Follow some basic safety tips:

- Travel in groups and be sure someone knows where you're going
- Know your machine and its capabilities
- Respect snowmobilers and yield to those with the right of way
- Go with extra caution if crossing a body of water
- When crossing roadways, be SURE the way is clear
- Operate at a reasonable speed for trail conditions
- Alcohol and snowmobiles do not mix

Hypothermia is classified as a drop in body temperature below 96 degrees. The warning signs include, uncontrollable shivering, numbness, confusion, disorientation, drowsiness, stiff muscles, slurred speech, slow, shallow breathing, irregular heartbeat, weak pulse and stumbling or loss of coordination. To protect yourself, follow these guidelines:

- Limit your time outdoors and wear warm, layered, natural fiber clothing
- Wear a hat, warm socks and gloves to reduce heat loss
- Stay indoors on windy days; wind chill can increase risks
- Keep indoor temperatures at a comfortable level
- Use enough blankets at night to stay warm
- Choose hot, nourishing meals and drink warm beverages.

By following some basic rules of safety, we can do our best to remain healthy and enjoy the beauty of the season.

Winter Safety for Kids

Give kids a snack before going outside. Those calories will give their bodies energy in the cold weather.

- Protect the kids' faces with sunscreen. The snow can reflect up to 85% of the sun's ultraviolet rays.
- Dress kids with long underwear, a turtleneck, sweater and a coat. Waterproof pants and jackets are great to keep wetness from seeping in to other clothing. The safe outfit wouldn't be complete without warm socks, boots and a hat to help keep the ears covered and the body heat in. Sometimes a change of mittens is all that's needed to stay out longer.
- Young children can strain muscles if lifting heavy shovels full of snow. You can purchase small, plastic shovels which will limit the amount that they can pick up. And, be sure to check if the noses are getting too red or if the mittens are getting too wet and need changing. Kids have a hard time knowing when they need to come inside and warm up.
- If your children are going off to sled, be sure that you know about the hill. Is it steep, is it clear or covered with trees and rocks? Is it near a busy road? These are not good locations for sledding. Sledding injuries can be serious, so, if possible, it's always good to supervise or have an adult accompany them.
- If ice skating or playing ice hockey, make sure your kids avoid injury by wearing supportive and properly fitted skates. Rinks are safer than ponds, but if a pond is all you have, check the thickness of the ice yourself before you let them go and, again, being there to supervise is always wise.
- Kids are at a greater risk of frostnip and frostbite than adults. Frostnip is an early warning sign of frostbite. It leaves the skin white and numb. After coming inside, remove all wet clothing. Immerse the chilled body parts in warm, not hot, water until they are able to feel sensation again. Frostbite occurs mostly in fingers, toes, ears, noses and cheeks. If you notice frostbite, take your child to the nearest hospital ER.



Check on Seniors

If you have elderly neighbors and family members, help them do a winter check-up before the cold weather sets in. They need to:

- Have their heating system checked
- Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors (WORKING)
- Have warm blankets and working flashlights
- Get an emergency supply of canned goods and necessities
- Have a battery-powered portable radio available
- Stock up on medications
- Pre-arrange for someone to check in on them



How About Your Pets?

Winter can be tough on us and on our four footed family members. Here are some tips to keep them safe as well.

More dogs are lost in winter than any other season. Be careful about letting your dog off leash on snow or ice. Double check that your dog has a proper identification on their collar, and, if micro-chipped, that your information is up to date. Visibility can

be compromised in the winter so using reflective gear when out walking is recommended. Also, using sweaters, coats and raincoats will help keep your dog dry and warm. Leaving your dog at home in winter can be safer than leaving him/her in the car. The car can act as a refrigerator in winter, holding cold air, and the potential for causing your animal to freeze.

Cats who go outdoors in winter will sometimes find comfort in sleeping under the hoods of warm cars. They can become injured or even killed by the motor or fan belt once the car is started. If you're at all unsure where your animal is, check under the hood by banging loudly on the hood or by honking the horn before starting your engine to give them time to run to safety.

Your pet's paw pads can take quite a beating as well. Pet booties can help to keep them from cracking and bleeding. You can apply Vaseline to the paws before a walk in snow and ice, and, once again when you return. This will keep the snow from sticking to their paws. Use pet friendly de-icer products such as sand or non-clumping kitty litter.

Don't forget to stock up on food and medical supplies for pets in case the weather doesn't allow you to get out for a couple of days.



EAP Can Help!

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