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**Joint Health Advisory**

**Dec 5, 2013**

**Agencies Partner to Issue Cold Weather Health Advisory**

*Spokane Regional Health District and Spokane Department of Emergency Management   
warn community about dangers of exposure to cold conditions*

**SPOKANE, Wash. –** With a wind chill watch in effect and temperatures expected to plummet in the next few days, [Spokane Regional Health District](http://www.srhd.org/) (SRHD) and [Spokane Department of Emergency Management](http://www.spokanecounty.org/emergencymgmt/) (DEM) are issuing thishealth advisoryto warn the community about the dangers of exposure to cold conditions. Exposure to cold temperatures can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone, including animals, can be affected.

"When the weather is extremely cold, and especially if there are high winds, try to stay indoors," said Dr. Joel McCullough, SRHD health officer. “To avoid hypothermia and frostbite, make any trips outside as brief as possible, and remember that by preparing for winter emergencies, the risks of weather-related health problems can be reduced.”

The [National Weather Service](http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?zoneid=WAZ036) has issued a wind chill watch, with brutally cold wind moving into the area Friday, Dec. 6, during the night, and continuing into Saturday morning. The watch means there is possibility of wind chill values dropping between 15 and 25 degrees below zero.

Extreme cold provides a dangerous situation that can result in health emergencies in susceptible people, such as those without shelter or who are stranded, or who live in a home that is poorly insulated or without heat.

**Preparing for extreme cold**

* Stock up on emergency supplies for communication, food, safety, heating, and car. Check out these [winter weather checklists](http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/beforestorm/supplylists.asp) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
* Listen to the radio or television, or follow social media channels, for winter storm forecasts and other information.
* Have appropriate cold weather clothing available.
* Make sure fireplace functions properly.
* Fill your vehicle’s gas tank before temperatures start dropping.

**During periods of extreme cold**

When residents must use space heaters and fireplaces to stay warm, the risk of household fires increases, as well as the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Use fireplace, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and never use a charcoal or gas grill indoors—the fumes are deadly.

Here are other tips to keep residents safe during extreme cold temperatures:

* If an individual must go outdoors, wear several layers of loose fitting, light weight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Wear mittens rather than gloves. Wear a hat. Cover mouth with a scarf to protect lungs from extremely cold air.
* Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia
  + Signs of frostbite include a white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, or numbness.
  + Signs of hypothermia include slurred speech, disorientation, uncontrollable shivering, stumbling, drowsiness and body temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit or less.
* If a resident becomes trapped outside, get out of the wind and stay dry. Build a lean-to or snow cave if nothing else is available. Do not eat snow; it will make you too cold.
* Cats and dogs should be kept inside and walks outdoors should be limited.
* Do not drive unnecessarily.

**If in a vehicle**

* Keep an emergency kit in the vehicle. Include a three-day supply of water and non-perishable food that can be eaten without being cooked. Include a blanket or sleeping bag for each passenger, a flashlight, cell phone, shovel, sack of sand or kitty litter, booster cables, flare, coffee can with lid and toilet paper.
* Individuals should make sure someone knows where they are going. Stay on the main roads.
* If an individual becomes stranded in his or her car, it is important to stay inside the car. Use a bright distress flag or hazard lights to draw attention to the vehicle.
* During night hours, keep the dome light on in the car so rescue crews can see your vehicle.

Remember also that winter weather patterns can trap air pollution – especially from wood stoves and fireplaces – near the ground, where it can build-up. This air pollution may [threaten people’s health](http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/AirQuality/OutdoorAir.aspx), especially those who have a lung condition like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), or with heart disease. Again, residents are encouraged to stay indoors.

For more local emergency preparedness info visit either the [health district’s page dedicated to emergency preparedness](http://www.srhd.org/services/emergency.asp) or the [Spokane Emergency Management web site](http://www.spokanecounty.org/emergencymgmt/). Become a fan of SRHD on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/spokanehealth) to receive local safety and wellness tips or follow them at [@spokanehealth](http://twitter.com/#!/spokanehealth). Follow DEM on Twitter [@GEGEmergencyMgt](https://twitter.com/GEGEmergencyMgt).

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