

Protect Yourself and Your Animals During Cold Weather

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is  reminding residents to prepare both themselves and their animals as temperatures dip dangerously low this week. The National Weather Service is possible snowfall across the state Wednesday night into Thursday and near-record low temperatures with gusty winds Friday and Saturday.

Code Purple overnight shelters are activated across the state for people who are homeless, with additional nights expected through the weekend. Since most Code Purple sites use volunteers to manage operations, the activation and implementation vary by county and site. To be connected to Code Purple resources, call Delaware 2-1-1, visit www.delaware211.org and click on the Code Purple button, or call the Delaware Housing Alliance's Centralized Intake Line at 302-654-0126, ext. 112.

Hypothermia and Frostbite

Hypothermia is one of the greatest health risks to people in cold and freezing temperatures. Hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature, can occur in cold weather or if a person becomes chilled by rain. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia especially dangerous, because a person may not know that it's happening and won't be able to do anything about it. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected.

Prevent problems before they occur:

When heading out in cold weather, remember the following:

- Water-resistant or waterproof outerwear is advisable to reduce the risk of hypothermia. Dress in layers of

loose-fitting clothes, including extra socks, which can be removed if they become damp. Wear warm, comfortable shoes.

- Wear hats, water-resistant coats, scarves or knit masks to cover the face and mouth, and gloves or mittens. Mittens are warmer than gloves.
- Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Perspiration can increase heat loss, and wet clothing can chill the body rapidly.
- When exerting yourself, it is important to remain hydrated by drinking water and other non-caffeinated beverages. Consuming alcoholic and caffeinated beverages can also cause the body to lose heat more rapidly.
- Cold weather can put extra strain on the heart, so individuals with heart disease or high blood pressure should follow their doctors' advice about exerting themselves in the cold.

Recognize the symptoms of frostbite:

Frostbite, an injury to the body that is caused by freezing, is another significant health risk in cold and freezing temperatures. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite increases for people with reduced blood circulation and among those who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures. At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin – frostbite may be beginning. Any of the following signs may indicate frostbite:

- A white or grayish-yellow skin area
- Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- Numbness

A victim is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb. If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care.

For more information on cold weather preparation, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/index.html>.

Protect your pet during cold weather:

Harsh weather conditions and cold temperatures can also be harmful to your pet. Take steps to keep them warm and healthy this winter:

- Bring pets indoors. This is the safest place for your pet during cold temperatures. Short-haired pets or very young or old pets should never be left outdoors in cold temperatures, and all pet dogs and cats should be brought indoors when the temperature falls below freezing. According to Delaware law, dogs cannot be left outdoors during hazardous weather warnings issued by the National Weather Service. DPH urges people to closely monitor weather updates.
- Protect outdoor pets from the elements. If your pet must be outdoors, you must provide a dry, draft-free shelter from the elements that contains moisture-resistant bedding such as straw or cedar shavings, which will help pets retain body heat. Housing should be appropriately sized for the animal and designed for animal sheltering. Pet owners should also provide a water-proof flap over the doorway to protect from wind and rain.
- Ensure access to water at all times. Frequently check water bowls to ensure water is not frozen. If you typically use a metal watering bowl, replace it with plastic as a pet's tongue can get stuck to metal in cold temperatures.
- Additional food may be needed. Animals burn more calories in cold temperatures in order to stay warm, so you may need to increase the amount of food you provide.

Check with your veterinarian about your pet's nutritional needs in cold weather.

- Outdoor cats need attention, too. Whether outdoor cats are owned, stray, or feral, they need the same protection from cold weather as your pets. If there are outdoor cats in your neighborhood, provide them with dry, warm shelter, as well as food and water to help them survive dangerously low temperatures. For your own safety, do not handle any unfamiliar animals, particularly if the rabies vaccination status is unknown. An animal may have rabies and not exhibit any external signs.

If you see a pet that has been left outdoors in cold temperatures without proper shelter or protection from the elements, food, or water, report it immediately to the Delaware Animal Services Hotline at 302-255-4646. For more information, visit: <https://animalservices.delaware.gov/>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.