

Winter weather increases cold-related illness, safety concerns

Written by gallupsun
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SANTA FE — The New Mexico Department of Health reminds residents ongoing winter weather in some parts of the state over the next few days can pose health risks and cold related illnesses. From Oct. 1 to Jan. 5 there have been over 400 cold-related emergency department visits statewide and five deaths reported.

The National Weather Service forecasts in the days ahead blizzard-type conditions as possible in northern areas and higher elevations with snow and blowing snow, and high winds that will drop temperatures statewide.

The DOH Environmental Public Health Tracking Program warns the type of cold-related illnesses that can happen when people are exposed to extreme cold can be serious when the body begins to lose heat faster than it produces. Prolonged exposure to cold eventually uses up the body's stored energy resulting in hypothermia.

Safety tips to keep in mind if traveling or are outdoors include:

- If you find yourself stranded in a vehicle, stay inside it, and call for emergency assistance if needed. Do not leave the vehicle to search for assistance unless help is visible within 100 yards.

- Shoveling snow is itself a strenuous activity that is harder for some people than others. Take frequent breaks in a warm environment and avoid injuries by not moving too much snow at one time.

- Use precautions while walking on snow and ice by wearing footwear with good traction. Spread de-icers on walking surfaces as quickly as possible after a winter storm. Plan ahead for safe snow removal. For tips for safe removal of snow and elevated surfaces, visit <https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather>.

- Dress for the weather. Wear multiple layers rather than fewer heavy layers. Wear a hat, gloves and boots. Wear wool or waterproof clothing when possible.

- Pay attention to potential cold-related illness symptoms such as shivering, confusion, exhaustion, numbness, tingling, slurred speech, color changes in the skin, and other symptoms. Seek medical attention if needed.

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- Bring your pets inside and make sure that they have proper bedding to protect them from the cold - both inside and outside.
- Power outages may be a factor in some communities. Where possible, have an alternative warm place to go. People most vulnerable to extreme cold are infants, the elderly, persons with chronic illness, outdoor workers, and the unhoused.
- If using a generator in the event of a power outage, place it outdoors 20 feet away from the home or business. This is especially important to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

Additional information about staying safe in winter weather is available at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website.

