

# ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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# NEWS RELEASE

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**For Immediate Release**

## Health Department Warns of Cold Weather Risks

With frigid weather forecast for our area, the Oneida County Health Department has issued some recommendations for avoiding health and safety problems during periods of prolonged cold temperatures.

*“When exposed to very cold temperatures, your body loses heat faster than it can be produced and will eventually use up your body’s stored energy,”* Phyllis Ellis, Director of Health for Oneida County said. She continued, *“Serious health problems can result from prolonged exposure to the cold including hypothermia and frostbite. People should limit their exposure to cold, and if they must be exposed they should dress properly in layers including a head covering, boots and gloves.”*

According to Ellis, as your body temperature decreases your capacity to think clearly or move well is affected. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person might not realize what’s happening and won’t be able to do anything about it. Hypothermia most often occurs at very cold temperatures but may occur at temperatures above 40 degrees if a person is chilled from rain or sweat or is submersed in cold water. Persons most commonly affected by hypothermia are the elderly, with inadequate food, clothing or heating; babies sleeping in cold bedrooms; people who remain exposed to cold temperatures for long periods of time including hikers, hunters, outdoor workers and the homeless; and people who use alcohol or illicit drugs. Hypothermia is recognized by shivering, exhaustion, confusion, slurred speech or memory loss.

If a person has been exposed to cold and these signs are evident, medical attention should be sought immediately. Warm beverages may be given if the person is conscious. Never give alcoholic beverages to a person suffering from hypothermia.

Frostbite can cause permanent injury to the tissues affected, particularly the ears, nose, fingers and toes. In extreme cases, frostbite can lead to amputation. Frostbite can be recognized by numbness, skin that feels unusually waxy or firm and skin that turns white or grayish-yellow. If you suspect someone is suffering from frostbite seek medical attention immediately. Never use a heat lamp, radiator, heating pad or other device to heat frostbitten areas since the affected areas are numb and may easily be burned.

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Dangers can also occur within the home during cold weather. In the event of a power outage

people will try to heat their homes using other means. You should never try to heat your house using a gas oven. Portable generators should always be placed outdoors and charcoal or gas grills should never be used in the home. Only use fireplaces, wood burning stoves and kerosene heaters if they are ventilated properly and never leave lit candles unattended. You should leave water taps slightly open allowing them to drip and to prevent pipes from freezing and keep a bottled drinking water supply on hand. During cold spells you should check the temperature in your house often and eat well-balanced meals.

**It's very important to have a properly working carbon monoxide (CO) detector in your home. Carbon monoxide, a colorless and odorless gas, claims more than 400 lives each year in the U.S.**

Health Department officials suggest you check on elderly relatives and neighbors during periods of prolonged cold to make sure their houses are adequately heated. Pet owners are reminded to take steps to insure the safety of their animals during cold spells. Never leave your pet chained or leashed outdoors with no protection from the elements. Animals' paws should be wiped dry after walks in the snow. Make sure pets are given adequate food high in protein to insure a healthy coat of fur.

*"The best way to protect yourself against the harmful effects of cold weather is to be prepared for it by dressing properly when outdoors and making sure your home and car are equipped for cold weather emergencies,"* Ellis cautioned.

For more information visit our web site at [www.ocgov.net/oneida/health](http://www.ocgov.net/oneida/health).