



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Take Steps to Avoid Hypothermia This Winter

Cold temperatures can be dangerous and deadly

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 29, 2019) - With zero to sub-zero temperatures predicted later this week around the state, many Kentuckians could be exposed to harsh winter elements. To prepare for these conditions, Department for Public Health (DPH) officials are emphasizing the importance of limiting exposure to the cold and taking necessary steps to prevent hypothermia.

“When the thermometer drops, people are at increased risk for hypothermia,” said DPH Commissioner Jeff Howard, M.D. “Hypothermia occurs when an individual’s body temperature drops below what is necessary to achieve normal metabolism and other bodily functions. In severe cases or when the body is not properly warmed, death can result.”

The condition occurs most often when an individual is submerged in icy waters. However, people exposed to cold weather who aren’t sufficiently prepared also are at an increased risk for the condition.

To prevent hypothermia, DPH advises that Kentuckians:

- Wear appropriate clothing. Layer clothes made of synthetic and wool fabrics, which are best for keeping warm. Always remember to wear hats, coats, scarves and gloves.
- Avoid consuming alcohol if outdoors. Alcohol can actually speed the loss of heat from the body.
- Avoid overexertion from activities that cause excessive sweat. This can lead to damp clothing, which causes chills.
- Stay as dry as possible.

Warning signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness. In infants, bright red/cold skin and very low energy are present.

If you notice any of these signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95° F, the situation is an emergency – get medical attention immediately.

If medical care is not available, begin warming the person as follows:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- If the victim is wearing any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first – chest, neck, head and groin using an electric blanket if available. You can also use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.

Individuals working outside during this time of year should pay extra attention to these guidelines, particularly those susceptible to overexertion. Outdoor workers should make

sure they are appropriately dressed and take frequent breaks to warm up and make sure their clothes are sufficient to keep them warm and dry.

“Be sure to check on your neighbors, especially if you have older adults living near you, to make sure they are okay during these frigid temperatures,” concluded Dr. Howard. “And take steps to protect your pets, livestock and farm animals from the cold too.”

To learn more, go to our website: www.chfs.ky.gov and type in “hypothermia” in the “What can we help you find?” search tool. More information on hypothermia can also be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/hypothermia.html>.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.