



**ST. JOSEPH COUNTY**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

# St. Joseph County Department of Health

*"Promoting physical and mental health and facilitating the prevention of disease, injury and disability for all St. Joseph County residents"*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **EXTREME COLD PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY**

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY- With wind chill temperatures in St. Joseph County dropping below zero degrees starting this weekend, the St. Joseph County Department of Health has issued a Public Health Advisory. Exposure to cold temperatures can cause serious life-threatening health problems.

The St. Joseph County Department of Health recommends the following precautions in order to prevent cold-related illness and injury:

- **Be prepared:**
  - Prepare your home and car for winter and make sure you have a way to heat your home safely during power failure.
    - Keep a multi-purpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher nearby when using alternative heating sources.
    - Never use a charcoal or gas grill indoors as the fumes are deadly.
    - Never leave candles unattended.
  - Keep extra blankets, flashlights with extra batteries, matches, first aid kit, manual can opener, snow shovel and rock salt, and special need items on hand.
  - Stock a few days' supply of water, required medications, and food that does not need to be refrigerated or cooked.
- **Monitor the temperature of your home.** Infants and persons over 65 are especially susceptible to cold. If it's not possible to keep your home warm, stay with friends or family or in a shelter.
- **Dress warmly and stay dry.** When going outdoors, dress in several layers to maintain body heat including a hat, scarf or knit mask to cover your face & mouth, mittens, sleeves that are snug at the wrist, and water resistant coat & boots. Covering up with blankets can also conserve heat.
- **Avoid prolonged exposure outdoors.** If you have pets, bring them inside or provide adequate shelter to keep them warm.
- **Eat and drink wisely.** Do not drink alcoholic or caffeinated beverages as they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly.
- **Avoid exertion.** Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. Consult your doctor before shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold if you have heart disease or high blood pressure.

Serious health problems that can result from prolonged exposure to the cold, most commonly hypothermia and frostbite.

**Hypothermia** is an abnormally low body temperature that occurs when people are exposed to cold temperatures. A person's body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced and prolonged exposure to cold will ultimately use up your body's stored energy, rendering it difficult to think clearly or move well. Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include:

- Shivering
- Exhaustion
- Confusion
- Fumbling Hands
- Memory Loss
- Slurred Speech
- Drowsiness
- Bright Red, Cold Skin (in infants)
- Very Low Energy (in infants)

If there are any signs of hypothermia present, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°F, the situation is an emergency and medical attention should be sought immediately. Until medical assistance arrives:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing the victim has on.
- Warm the center of the body first (chest, neck, head, and groin) using dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Give warm beverages (non-alcoholic) to the victim if they are conscious.
- Keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket after body temperature has increased.

**Frostbite** is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. Warning signs and symptoms of frostbite include:

- Redness or pain in any skin area
- A white or grayish yellow skin area
- Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- Numbness

If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care. While waiting for medical assistance:

- Get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin at the first sign of redness or pain.
- Immerse the affected area in warm water or warm the affected area using body heat.
- Do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it.
- Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

The St. Joseph County Department of Health will continue to work with other agencies and City Offices to provide up-to-date information through the news media about additional methods and precautions the community can take in times of extreme cold. For more information, follow the St. Joseph County Health Department social media outlets or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).