NEW YORK STATE | Department of Health

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DAL: NH 26-16
Subject: Cold Weather Advisory

Dear Nursing Home Administrator:

With the arrival of cold temperatures, you are encouraged to take the necessary precautions to ensure that residents are comfortable and safe in Nursing Homes throughout the cold weather months. Regulations at both the New York State (Title 10 of New York Codes, Rules, and Regulations § 415.5) and Federal (Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations § 483.10) levels require that Nursing Homes maintain comfortable and safe indoor temperatures. For those residents who might be leaving the Nursing Home for any reason, including outside visits or community events, Nursing Homes must ensure that any health or safety issues associated with cold weather have been assessed and addressed.

During the colder weather months, many residents may be at risk for cold-related illnesses. Elderly residents and those with health problems such as diabetes and circulatory or thyroid diseases are at increased risk of developing hypothermia and frostbite. Regulations at Title 10 of New York Codes, Rules, and Regulations (NYCRR) Part 713 require nursing homes to be equipped with a heating system capable of maintaining all resident areas at a minimum temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. However, occupied areas are not required to be kept at these temperatures if residents are comfortable at a lower temperature. If low room temperatures are identified, individual body temperatures should be monitored to ensure there is no risk of hypothermia to the resident. Nursing homes should be cognizant of the needs and wishes of each resident and assure that a safe and appropriate temperature is provided.

Cold-Related Conditions

During the cold weather months, residents may be at risk for cold-related conditions. Elderly residents and those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, circulatory, or thyroid disease are at increased risk for hypothermia and frostbite. The following information summarizes common cold-related conditions.

Hypothermia: A drop in one's core body temperature below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. This may occur when exposure to the cold causes a person's body to lose heat faster than it can be produced.

Hypothermia can occur with air temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit (15-18 degrees Celsius).

Symptoms: Symptoms of hypothermia vary depending on the duration of exposure to cold temperatures.

Early Symptoms: Shivering, fatigue, loss of coordination, confusion and disorientation.

Late Symptoms: No shivering, blue skin, dilated pupils, slowed pulse and breathing, and loss of consciousness.

Management: Move the person into a warm room and warm their body with a blanket.

Seek medical attention to determine need for further treatment.

Frostbite: A decrease in blood flow to an individual's extremities due to exposure to extreme cold resulting in freezing of the skin. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in the affected areas. In extremely cold temperatures, the risk of frostbite is increased in residents with reduced blood circulation and those who are not properly dressed.

Symptoms: Symptoms of frostbite include reduced blood flow to hands and feet, numbness, tingling or stinging, aching, bluish or pale, waxy skin.

Management: Move the person into a warm room and immerse the affected area in warm (not hot) water. The temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body.

Do not rub or massage the frostbitten area as doing so may cause more damage.

Do not use a heating pad, or the heat of a stove or radiator for warming. Frostbitten skin is numb and can be easily burned.

Seek medical attention to determine need for further treatment.

Emergency Preparedness

It is our shared goal to ensure the protection of nursing home residents, staff, and property. In times of disaster or emergency, a Nursing Home's ability to respond in a timely, organized, and effective manner can mean the difference between life and death. Minimum disaster and emergency preparedness requirements are outlined in regulation at 10 NYCRR § 415.26(f). Additionally, be reminded that there are certain required Health Commerce System role assignments, as outlined in Dear Administrator Letter DACF 22-18/NH 22-03, including a 24/7 contact. Due to the nature of emergencies, the 24/7 contact should reflect a mobile phone number - not the facility's landline - to ensure the ability of the 24/7 contact to make and receive calls in emergencies and/or during times of suboptimal telephone and/or internet connectivity.

Please locate the most recent version of the Incident Report Manual which outlines reporting requirements and key contact information to facilitate timely, regulatorily compliant reporting.

In anticipation of seasonal cold weather events, the Department has developed a survey to proactively capture each Nursing Home's redundancy profile to assist in coordinating valuable administrative response resources. Each Nursing Home is asked to complete the

following survey by December 15, 2026. Your cooperation in completing this profile information will be helpful as the Department optimizes its weather-related response activities.

Enclosed is additional information regarding steps to be taken by Nursing Homes in cold weather, steps to prevent hypothermia and frostbite, and symptoms of cold exposure and treatment. This information is to be posted in a conspicuous area in your Nursing Home that is accessible by both staff and residents.

Thank you for your continued efforts to maintain the health and safety of those who reside in New York State nursing homes. If you have questions, please email nhinfo@health.ny.gov.

Sincerely,

Stephanie E. Paton, RN, Director
Division of Nursing Home and ICF/IID Surveillance

Enclosure

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STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY NURSING HOMES IN COLD WEATHER

Maintain situational awareness of potential weather fronts.

Albany, NY Forecast Office: https://www.weather.gov/aly/
Binghamton, NY Forecast Office: https://www.weather.gov/bgm/
New York, NY Forecast Office: https://www.weather.gov/okx/
Burlington, VT Forecast Office: https://www.weather.gov/btv/

Maintain heating systems in good working order in accordance with program regulations.

- If heating equipment malfunctions, please follow the steps outlined in the Incident Report Manual.

Calibrate thermometers to ensure their accuracy.

Ensure that carbon monoxide detectors are installed and frequently monitored to ensure functionality.

Ensure that you have sufficient generator fuel on hand, and that you follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule.

Ensure that all means of egress to the public way are kept clear and functional at all times.

Observe and monitor residents to ensure both their comfort and safety.

If there are areas that fall below the required indoor temperature required by regulation, residents must be moved to common areas that meet the proper temperature. The area must be of sufficient size to safely accommodate the residents in compliance with applicable infection control policies and procedures.

If the regulatory minimum temperature is not sustained, the emergency plan must be activated. Please follow the steps outlined in the Incident Report Manual.

Check all doors/windows for drafts. Eliminate drafts when possible by drawing curtains/shades on days when the temperatures are below freezing. Encourage residents to sit away from windows/drafts.

Familiarize all staff with the symptoms of cold-related conditions and their management; and with the facility's cold weather policies and procedures including when to implement them.

Encourage residents to wear appropriate winter clothing while indoors and to dress in layers with appropriate outerwear when leaving the building.

Residents should always wear a hat or ear covering and gloves when going outdoors.

Encourage residents not to partake in outdoor activities for extended periods of time.

Know the whereabouts of all residents to ensure their health and safety is maintained.

Offer warm fluids/beverages to residents during the winter months.

Avoid prolonged outdoor exposure on very cold days. Do not stay outdoors for extended periods.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY NURSING HOMES IN COLD WEATHER

Increase activity level according to the temperature. Avoid activities that cause physical exhaustion.

Dress in layers. Layers of clothing are warmer than one thick layer of clothing. Avoid tight clothing as it reduces blood circulation.

Wear clothing to protect ears, face, hands and feet in extremely cold weather.

Boots should be waterproof and insulated.
Wear gloves.
Wear a hat. Hats reduce the amount of body heat that escapes from the head.

Drink large amounts of non-alcoholic, decaffeinated warm fluids.

Replace wet or damp clothes as soon as possible during the winter months.

If there is a feeling of coldness or shivering begins, add a layer of clothing and/or notify a staff person.

SYMPTOMS OF COLD EXPOSURE AND MANAGEMENT

Cold-Related Condition	Signs and Symptoms	Management
Hypothermia	• Shivering • Fatigue • Drowsiness • Exhaustion • Blue skin and/or numbness Confusion/disorientation • Loss of coordination • Memory loss • Slurred speech • Glassy stare • Slow, irregular pulse • Decreased level of consciousness	• Remove all wet clothing. • Place the resident in dry clothing or blanket. • Move the resident to warm indoor environment. • If conscious, give the resident a warm non-alcoholic beverage. • Seek medical attention to determine whether further treatment is needed.
Frostbite	• Any discoloration of the skin: bluish, pale, flushed, white or yellow • Skin appears waxy • Lack of feeling, numbness, tingling, stinging or aching	• Move resident into warm area. • Handle the frostbitten area gently. **DO NOT RUB THE AREA.** • Immerse affected area into warm (not hot) water or place the affected area against a warm body part (e.g. armpit). • Seek medical attention to determine if further treatment is needed.