



## Winter and Extreme Cold Preparation

*Stay Safe and Warm this Winter!*

### Prepare for Winter Weather

During the winter months, air temperature and weather can potentially be hazardous especially to individuals with disabilities and other vulnerable populations. To ready yourself for winter, there are a number of things you can do both inside and outside of your home.

#### Indoor Preparation

If possible, winterize your home or facility by installing weather stripping, insulation, and storm windows. Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure that it is clean, working properly, and ventilated to the outside. Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available. However, if using an alternative heating source, be mindful of carbon monoxide, an odorless and colorless gas. Prevent carbon monoxide emergencies by installing a carbon monoxide detector. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Finally, stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration and water stored in clean containers.

#### Outdoor Preparation

Prior to traveling, be aware of current and forecasted weather conditions. If you do have to travel, dress appropriately. Wear winter-appropriate clothing such as layering light clothing with warm clothing, gloves, hats, etc. Prevent falls outdoors by using cat litter or sand on icy walkways. Finally, prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. Visit the CDC's website to see what you should put in your emergency kit at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/winterweather/index.html>



### Cold Weather Health Emergencies

Individuals with disabilities may want to take extra care during the cold weather season. Some disabling conditions may limit sensory abilities and the ability to maintain body heat, so **be particularly vigilant about staying warm when you are out in low temperatures.**

Additionally, individuals who are prone to wander or elope from their homes may experience life threatening health emergencies such as hypothermia. Hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature, is a dangerous condition that can occur when a person is exposed to extremely cold temperatures. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well.

Be alert during the winter months and use precautions to prevent elopement.

Taking preventive action is your best defense against having to deal with extreme cold-weather conditions.



## Featured Health Alert

### *Sickle Cell Anemia*

Sickle cell disease also known as sickle cell anemia is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders. Healthy red blood cells are round, and they move through small blood vessels to carry oxygen to all parts of the body. In someone who has sickle cell anemia, the red blood cells become hard and sticky and look like a C-shaped farm tool called a “sickle”. The sickle cells die early, which causes a constant shortage of red blood cells. Also, when they travel through small blood vessels, they get stuck and clog the blood flow. This can cause pain and other serious problems such as infection, acute chest syndrome and stroke.

Pain episodes or crisis can occur without warning when sickle cells block blood flow and decrease oxygen delivery. Individuals may describe this pain as sharp, intense, stabbing, or throbbing. Pain can strike almost anywhere in the body and in more than one spot at a time. But the pain often occurs in the lower back, legs, arms, abdomen (stomach), or the chest.

A pain crisis can be brought on by:

- Illness
- Temperature changes
- Stress
- Dehydration (not drinking enough fluids)
- Being at high altitudes



For more health and safety alerts, please visit our website at [www.dbhds.virginia.gov](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov)



## Stay Safe with Dementia Tips for Wandering

**Six in 10 people with dementia will wander.** A person with dementia or Alzheimer's may not remember his or her name or address, and can become disoriented, even in familiar places. Wandering among people with dementia is dangerous, but there are strategies and services to help prevent it. Elopement may also occur with individuals with autism. Strategies for safety can be implemented for all individuals.

1. Ensure basic needs are met.
2. Avoid busy places that can cause confusion.
3. Keep a routine.
4. Use devices that signal when a door or window has been opened.
5. Provide supervision.
6. Keep car keys out of sight.
7. Reassure individuals that they are safe.

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

## Discharge Planning

Do you have an individual returning home after a hospital stay? Be ready with this Discharge Planning Check list.

- Ask questions about the individual's health condition, what problems to look out for, and what to do about them.
- Review any new medications with a medical professional.
- Ask if there will be any new medical equipment needed.
- Review any tasks that may require special skills. Make arrangements if specialized staff is required.
- Confirm if a follow up appointment is needed.
- Ask for written discharge instructions.
- Ensure that all of your questions are answered prior to discharge.

