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## **NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR THE AGING OFFERS WINTER SAFETY TIPS FOR OLDER NEW YORKERS**

### ***Cold Weather Conditions Can Profoundly Affect the Health and Safety of Older Adults***

The New York State Office for the Aging reminds older New Yorkers and caregivers to take precautions in winter weather, as cold temperatures and heavy snow can create hazardous conditions for older adults.

“Ice, snow, and cold temperatures can be a challenge for everyone, but can be particularly dangerous for older adults, who need to be aware of what they must do—or not do—to best protect their health,” **said Acting Director Greg Olsen**. “Many older adults also have less social contact during winter months, which can lead to loneliness and isolation. Neighbors and family members should regularly check on older individuals to make sure they are healthy and safe.”

Some health and safety considerations for older New Yorkers during winter months include:

#### **Physical Activity/Falls Prevention/Isolation**

- Those with cardiac issues or high blood pressure should always follow doctor’s orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous outdoor activity.
  - Healthy adults should dress in warm layers and work slowly when doing outdoor chores.
  - Take extra precautions to reduce the risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Dress appropriately. Don’t ignore early warnings signs, which include shivering, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, and slurred speech. Shivering is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to return indoors.
  - Be careful when clearing your car after a snowstorm. Sitting inside a vehicle while the motor is running can become deadly if the tailpipe has been blocked by snow or ice.
  - To prevent falls, wear shoes with good traction and non-skid soles, and avoid icy walkways. Remove shoes as soon as you return indoors. Melted snow on floors can lead to slippery conditions inside.
  - To avoid social isolation and combat depression, older adults are encouraged to contact [NY Connects](#) at 800-342-9871 or their local area agency on aging to find a senior center in
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their community. In addition, a check-in system, where someone regularly calls or looks in on an older family member or neighbor can make a big difference in their lives.

### **Heat your Home Safely**

- If you use a fireplace, wood stove, or portable kerosene heater to stay warm, be sure there is adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough fresh air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up in your home.
- Never use a natural gas or propane stove/oven to heat your home. If you are using a kerosene heater, use K-1 grade kerosene only. Never substitute with fuel oil, diesel, gasoline or yellow (regular) kerosene.
- Follow all safety precautions when using wood stoves, space heaters, electric heaters, kerosene heaters, and pellet stoves.
- When adding fuel to a space heater, or wood to a wood stove or fireplace, wear non-flammable gloves. Never add fuel to a space heater when it is hot. The fuel can ignite, burning you and your home. Keep the heater away from objects that can burn, such as furniture, rugs or curtains.

The [Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#) helps low-income people pay the cost of heating their homes. Eligible individuals may receive one regular HEAP benefit per program year and could also be eligible for emergency HEAP benefits if they are in danger of running out of fuel or having utility service shut off. The 2019-2020 regular HEAP benefit opened November 12, 2019, and the 2019-2020 emergency benefit will open January 2, 2020. For more information, please visit the [HEAP](#) website or call 1-800-342-3009.

### **Generator Safety**

- Never run a generator in your home or indoor spaces, such as garages, basements, porches, crawlspaces or sheds, or in partly enclosed spaces such as carports or breezeways. Generators should only be operated outside, far away from (25 feet or more if possible) and downwind of buildings. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions to avoid fire and or carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading your generator can damage it and any appliances connected to it. Fire may result. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Fuel spilled on a hot generator can cause an explosion. If your generator has a detachable fuel tank, remove it before refilling. If this is not possible, shut off the generator and let it cool before refilling.

[Don't Be Left in the Dark - Weathering Floods, Storms and Power Outages](#), developed by the New York State Department of Health, is a guide for homeowners and others who want to prepare for power outages and other consequences of severe weather events.

Additional [cold weather tips](#) are available on the New York State Department of Health website.

**About the New York State Office for the Aging and Health Across All Policies/Age-Friendly New York**

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New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) continuously works to help New York State's 4.3 million older adults be as independent as possible for as long as possible through advocacy, development and delivery of person-centered, consumer-oriented, and cost-effective policies, programs, and services that support and empower older adults and their families, in partnership with the network of public and private organizations that serve them.

New York is nationally recognized for being the [first age-friendly state](#) in the nation. Using the state's [Prevention Agenda](#) as the overarching framework, in 2017, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo launched a [Health Across All Policies](#) approach, where public and private partners work together to positively impact population health by marrying health care, preventive health, and community-design, in concert with addressing [social determinants of health](#), to improve the lives of all New Yorkers, young and old.

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