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Heating Safety for Winter

Although staying warm is paramount in the winter, it is possible for accidents such as fires, smoke inhalation, and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning to occur. It is critical that the methods used for staying warm are safe. Here are a few safety tips to remember:

- Change the air filter in your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system regularly to keep indoor air healthy and safe.
- Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys regularly.
- Have a professional service your heating system to make sure that it is working well.
- Keep flammable materials away.
- Never leave heaters unattended.
- Ventilate to the outside to prevent accumulation of smoke, carbon monoxide and dust indoors.
- Have a safe alternate heating source and alternative fuels available – alternative fuels include gaseous fuels like hydrogen, natural gas, propane, alcohols such as ethanol, butanol, and methanol, vegetable and waste derived oils, and electricity.

Space heater safety tips



Plug heater directly into a wall outlet



Keep things that can burn 3 feet away



Shut off when you leave

Essential Tips to Stay Safe and Healthy This Winter!

As winter sets in, it brings unique challenges that can impact one's health including poor indoor air quality from heating appliances and increased time spent indoors, flu and cold season, and extreme weather such as snow or ice storms that could cause power outages and unsafe driving conditions. In this issue of HEAL, we provide essential tips to ensure that you and the children you care for stay in a safe and healthy environment during the winter months.



Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Emergencies

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is odorless, tasteless, and invisible. It may accumulate in indoor spaces from fuel-burning devices. CO poisoning is preventable. Here are tips on staying safe:

- Install CO detectors on every level of the building or childcare business.
- Test your CO detectors monthly. If it is battery operated, check, and replace the batteries when needed (typically every 6 months) - this helps in case a power outage and you are forced to use either wood stoves or fireplaces for heating.
- Have chimneys, heating systems/furnaces, water heaters and other gas-, oil- or coal-burning appliances serviced annually by a professional.
- Use furnaces, stoves, dryers, and fireplaces according to manufacturer's instructions and make sure their vents are clear of snow and other debris.

Safe Disinfection to Prevent the Spread of Germs

In addition to cleaning, it is recommended that you disinfect your facility to prevent the spread of germs especially when a student is sick. However, it is vital that safe disinfection practices are followed:

- Always read and follow the directions on the label or instruction manual.
- Wear protective equipment (i.e., gloves or goggles) and wash your hands immediately after disinfecting, with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Leave the disinfectant on the surface long enough to kill the germs. This is called the contact time. The surface should stay wet during the entire contact time to make sure germs are killed. Contact time differs by disinfectant and is listed on the product bottle.
- When using disinfection products indoors, ensure good ventilation (for example, use a fan or open windows and doors to allow fresh air to enter).
- Do not mix products or chemicals with each other and if the product instructions tell you to dilute the product with water, use water at room temperature (unless the label says otherwise).
- Do not eat, drink, breathe, or apply disinfection products directly to skin.
- Store and use chemicals out of the reach of children and label diluted cleaning or disinfectant solutions clearly.

Contact Us



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Additional Resources



National Center for
Environmental Health:
Stay Safe and Healthy
in Winter



CDC: Stay Safe During
& After a Winter Storm



CDC: When and How
to Clean and Disinfect
a Facility



Ready.gov: Winter
Weather



ReadyPA.gov: Know
the Threats: Winter
Weather



U.S. Fire
Administration: Severe
Weather Fire Safety

- Use the disinfectant prior to its expiration date or discard if it has passed its expiration date.

If ready-to-use disinfectants are not available, you can use bleach solutions (ex: 1 tablespoon bleach to 1 quart water) for many hard surfaces. Bleach solutions will be effective against bacteria, viruses, and fungi when properly diluted. Note that disinfectants activated or diluted with water may have a shorter shelf life.

More Ways to Stay Healthy in Winter



Dress for Warmth: Encourage parents to make sure students are dressed warmly for protection from the winter chill. Students should wear layers of clothes (layering). Layering is an effective way to stay warm. Finally, ensure students' hands, feet, and head are always covered when outside.

Stay Hydrated: In cold weather, it is possible to forget to stay hydrated. Encourage students and staff to drink lots of water to keep the body functioning at its best. Additionally, individuals can drink warm (non-sugary) beverages like herbal teas and soups to keep warm and maintain hydration.

Exercise: Staying active in winter is vital for both physical and mental well-being. Students can participate in winter-friendly activities like winter hiking. Alternatively, sports and play can be organized indoors. Keep kids moving safely, stay visible, and be cautious of slippery surfaces to prevent accidents.

Stay Informed on Weather Updates and Alerts: Keep an eye on weather forecasts and alerts. Stay informed about upcoming storms or extreme temperatures so that you can plan and prepare for adverse conditions. You can sign up for weather advisory apps such as Weather.gov on your mobile phone. Sign up for Pennsylvania specific alerts at Ready.pa.gov.

Be Prepared for Power Outages and Snowstorms: Winter months can bring snowstorms and power outages. Taking the following precautions while shoveling snow and walking on slippery surfaces will help prevent injury: stretch before shoveling, push snow instead of lifting when possible and lift with your legs when necessary, avoid twisting motions, take small steps and wear appropriate footwear with traction to reduce chances of slips and falls. Should you lose power during a storm, use battery-powered devices for emergency lighting. Know your utility hotlines and call to report outages.

Be Prepared for Winter Driving: Prepare your vehicles (including school buses and vans) for winter by checking tires, brakes, and fluid levels. Keep an emergency kit in the vehicle, including blankets or sleeping bags and other items to stay warm (i.e., extra hats, coats, and mittens), non-perishable snacks, water, booster cables, flares, tire pump, a bag of sand (for traction), compass or maps, flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries, first-aid kit), cell phone, and portable charger in preparation for emergencies. Finally, ensure the car is professionally serviced especially the radiator, maintain antifreeze levels, and keep the gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.