

Preparing for Cold Weather Events

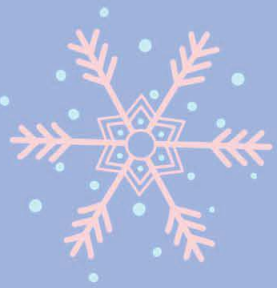
**ICY
CONDITIONS
AHEAD
USE EXTREME
CAUTION**



CLIMATE CHANGE - largely driven by burning fossil fuels - is generating unpredictable, sudden and extreme changes in how we are impacted by weather. The frequency, intensity and impacts of unusual and extreme weather events are increasing the risk of community shocks.

MINDFULLY PREPARING FOR extreme cold, rapid snowfall or freezing rain events and the possibility for power outages during cold weather can help build individual and community-wide safety, security, wellbeing and resilience.





Cold Weather Events & Climate Justice



****Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice****

PROACTIVE STRATEGIES and PATHWAYS of action grounded in principles and practices of climate justice can also meaningfully address inequitable and disproportionate impacts on equity-seeking and under-resourced groups and communities most impacted by climate-magnified cold weather events.

ENGAGING IN COLLECTIVE CARE and community resilience building before, during and after extreme cold events can help increase individual and community agency and proactively mitigate disproportionate harms.

This resource gathers some strategies to support the navigation of extreme cold risks, anxieties and impacts.



Extreme Cold & Populations Made Vulnerable

SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES like racism, poverty, ableism, exclusion from safe/affordable housing and generational impacts of colonialism can all shape the severity of how someone experiences cold weather impacts. This means social factors of health like race, age, gender, class, income or disability can affect vulnerability to extreme cold events or shocks.

Who might be disproportionately impacted?

- The unhoused due to a lack of provided safe and sustainable housing
- Those with limited mobility or who use mobility aids
- Elderly populations due to declined ability to regulate body temperature
- Diabetics or those on medication that alters cold regulation
- Outdoor workers exposed to frostbite, hypothermia and heightened body strain
- Those not able to work from home or take time off to avoid the cold
- Those living in housing not built to withstand cold
- Those living in rental or temporary housing who face challenges in making structural changes to living spaces (e.g. changing heating systems, windows)



Cold Weather Events, Trauma & Trust

****Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice****

Extreme cold events can cause trauma at individual and collective levels when a community is not prepared. Prolonged freezing, power failures and transportation closures can impact access to safe housing, food and water, health care and other essential services.

Physical, mental and emotional impacts of trauma can continue after temperatures have returned to normal. For example, some who experienced the Texas winter crisis of 2021 experienced trauma responses like increased anxiety, depression and trouble sleeping in subsequent winters.

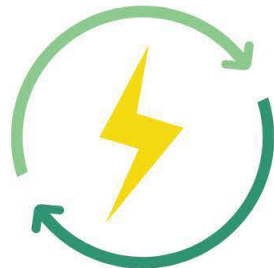
Traumatic cold weather events are made worse by poor institutional responses. When institutions fail to provide essential services and security, individuals and communities can experience loss of trust and feelings of abandonment that intensify traumatic experiences.

Extreme Cold Coping Strategies

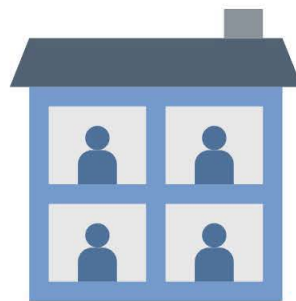
System Level

Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice

Support equity-informed transitions to renewable energy



Centre climate justice principles when planning and preparing for extreme cold



Advocate for policies that prioritize essential cold-weather services to equity-deserving communities



Address injustice and inequities. Support and work to empower communities systemically situated to be most at-risk during extreme cold events

Push for institutional and community divestment from fossil fuels, which are driving the magnification of extreme weather events

Extreme Cold Coping Strategies

Community Level

****Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice****

- Create a telephone or neighbour-to-neighbour check-in tree to provide support to at-risk community members
- Call on institutions to provide timely information, resources and response plans that support institutional trust and physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- Build a mutual aid network and sharing economy within your community to increase access to heating, water, food, health and other essential resources



Extreme Cold Coping Strategies

Community Level

****Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice****

Call on decision-makers to develop and mobilize an extreme cold community action plan that works to coordinate different departments & organizations to work together to mitigate cold-related risks and harm



Call on cities to monitor and enforce safe-housing bylaws, including installation of thermometers, carbon monoxide detectors and sufficient insulation in buildings



Advocate for the creation of community "warm banks," or heated public spaces where community members can shelter

Extreme Cold Coping Strategies

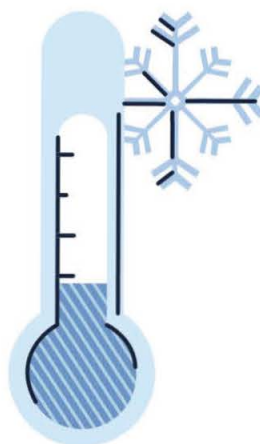
Individual Level

****Extreme cold events can be dangerous. Always heed expert and official advice****

If you're aware of an incoming extreme cold event, try to plan ahead: keep several days worth of food, water, medicines and other essential supplies in your home



Monitor your body temperature, as well as the body temperatures and health of those most at-risk such as infants, elders, and those with pre-existing respiratory and heart conditions



Dress in warm, loose layers including coat, pants, footwear, hat, scarf and mittens



Use items such as water-resistant clothing and umbrellas to stay dry



If possible, minimize travel by working from home and stay in touch with friends or family via phone or video calls



If possible, minimize the amount of time you spend outside



Extreme Cold Coping Strategies

Individual Level

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- Identify and create a warm zone in your living space by covering doors and windows of a room with blankets or towels to keep cold out and heat in
- Use a hot water bottle for heat
- Do not use propane, camping or gas stoves meant for outdoor use, or gas heaters to heat an indoor space. These can cause extreme indoor air pollution, fire hazards and carbon monoxide poisoning - which can be deadly
- Only use portable heaters that have auto safety shut-off to mitigate fire and pollution hazards



Sources

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- "Preventing cold-related morbidity and mortality in a changing climate," Kathryn Conlon et al. 2011.
- "The Effects of Cold Temperatures on Health," Government of Quebec. November 30, 2022.