



HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT MEDIA RELEASE

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Incoming winter storm leads to public health concerns

KALAMAZOO, Mich. – In anticipation of an impactful winter storm set to bring heavy snow, high winds, and extreme cold to the area starting Friday, Jan. 12, the Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services Department shares important reminders with the community.

“As we brace for the impending winter storm, it’s crucial for residents to prioritize their safety and well-being,” Health Officer Jim Rutherford said. “We encourage everyone to follow the preventative tips below, and to check in on their neighbors throughout the storm, especially older adults.”

During a power outage, food safety may be compromised.

Potentially hazardous foods are anything that require temperature control, such as raw meats, dairy, or cooked foods. HCS recommends the following:

- Leave refrigerators closed as long as possible to prevent cold air from escaping during short outages.
- After a power outage, throw out perishable foods that were in your refrigerator after 4 hours, in a half-full freezer for 24 hours, or a full freezer for 48 hours.
- Never taste food to determine its safety after a power outage.
- “When in doubt, throw it out.”
- More information on food safety: <http://bit.ly/3m0wVbs>

Generator safety is also a serious concern during an emergency.

Remember to never use a portable generator inside your home or garage, even if the doors and windows are open—due to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Please follow these guidelines when using a generator:

- Only use generators outdoors, more than 20 feet away from your home, doors, and windows.
- Do not use a generator in an open garage or carport.
- Do NOT use a generator without first checking that battery-powered CO detectors are properly functioning in your home.
- More information on generator safety: <http://bit.ly/3IOIZFN>

Spending time outdoors in cold weather can lead to hypothermia and frostbite, with infants and older adults being most susceptible.

The best way to prevent hypothermia and frostbite is to stay indoors. When exposed to cold temperatures, the body begins to lose heat faster than it is produced. Prolonged exposure to cold can

result in injury, hospitalization, or even death. If you must go outside, please follow these guidelines to protect yourself:

- Dress in layers to trap warm air and regulate body temperature.
- Cover any exposed skin, including fingers, toes, nose, and ears, with appropriate clothing.
- Stay dry by using waterproof outer layers and removing wet clothing quickly.
- Do not put dry feet and socks into wet boots. If dry boots are not available, put on clean, dry socks, then slip a plastic grocery or trash bag over socks before placing feet into wet boots.
- Recognize early signs of hypothermia, such as shivering, confusion, and loss of coordination.
- Recognize early signs of frostbite, including numbness, tingling or stinging, aching, and bluish or pale, waxy skin.
- More information on cold weather injury prevention: <https://bit.ly/3Hc7jii>

Warming centers are available to those who need them.

There are several warming centers open to community members across Kalamazoo County. These resources offer food, water, warmth, and comfort to community members in need.

Day warming centers are available at:

- Ministry with Community – located at 500 N. Edwards St. in Kalamazoo, open Monday through Sunday from 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Food, showers, laundry, warm clothing, hygiene supplies, and pet food provided.
- The Salvation Army – located at 1700 S. Burdick St. in Kalamazoo, open Monday through Sunday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Closed from Noon to 1 p.m. Food and bus tokens provided.
- Westminster Presbyterian Church – located at 1515 Helen Ave. in Portage, open Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Lunch provided.
- Kalamazoo Gospel Mission – located at 448 N. Burdick St. in Kalamazoo, open Monday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For information on warming locations and availability within Kalamazoo County, contact Gryphon Place 211 or visit <https://www.gryphon.org/211>.

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