

News Release

January 12, 2018

Extreme Cold Weather Alert – seek shelter, check on loved ones

Based on information from Environment Canada, Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, has issued an Extreme Cold Weather Alert today for Toronto that will be in effect until further notice. Extreme Cold Weather Alerts are issued when the temperature is forecast to reach -15 degrees Celsius or colder, or when the wind chill is forecast to reach -20 or colder.

Exposure to cold weather can be harmful to your health. Hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 35 degrees Celsius and can have severe consequences, including organ failure and death. Frostbite can also occur in cold weather when skin freezes and in severe cases can lead to amputation when deeper tissues freeze.

Those most at risk of cold-related illness are people experiencing homelessness or those under-housed, those who work outdoors, people with a pre-existing heart condition or respiratory illness, elderly people, infants and young children. People with heart problems can experience worsening of their condition up to several days after cold weather occurs.

Extreme Cold Weather Alerts activate local services that focus on getting and keeping vulnerable residents inside. These services include additional shelter beds, notification to community agencies to relax any service restrictions, availability of transit tokens in some drop-ins, and overnight street outreach. Between November 15, 2017 and April 15, 2018, winter respite services are available continuously at several drop-in locations across the city, operating 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Call 311 for locations or check the web app at <http://www.toronto.ca/homelesshelp>.

The City asks that residents help vulnerable people by calling 311 if there is a need for street outreach assistance. Call 911 if the situation is an emergency.

During an Extreme Cold Weather Alert, members of the public are encouraged to take the following precautions:

- Check the weather report before going outside.
- Dress in layers, making sure your outer layer is windproof, and cover exposed skin.
- Wear a hat, warm mittens or gloves, and warm boots.
- Stay dry. Your risk of hypothermia is much greater if you are wet.
- Choose wool or synthetic fabrics for your clothes instead of cotton, because cotton stops keeping you warm once it gets wet.
- Seek shelter if you normally spend long periods outside. Depending on the wind chill, exposed skin can freeze in minutes.
- Drink warm fluids, other than alcohol.

- Warm up by taking regular breaks in heated buildings when enjoying winter activities outside.
- Consider rescheduling outdoor activities, or limiting time outdoors, during colder temperatures, especially if it's windy.
- Heat your home to at least 21 degrees Celsius if infants or elderly people are present.
- Call or visit vulnerable friends, neighbours and family to ensure they are not experiencing any difficulties related to the weather.

Find out more about winter services for homeless and under-housed individuals at <http://www.toronto.ca/homelesshelp>.

More information and tips for staying warm during cold weather are available at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/extreme-cold-weather/>.

Information to help residents prepare for extreme weather and weatherproof their homes is available at <http://www.toronto.ca/extremeweatherready>.

Toronto is Canada's largest city, the fourth largest in North America, and home to a diverse population of about 2.8 million people. It is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture and is consistently ranked one of the world's most livable cities. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can visit <http://www.toronto.ca>, call 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or follow us on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/TorontoComms>, on Instagram at <http://www.instagram.com/cityofto> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/cityofto>.

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