

How to stay safe when riding out a blizzard

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Tips for protecting you, your family and your home.

(HealthDay)—As a potentially record-breaking blizzard pummels the U.S. Northeast, there are steps residents should take to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, doctors say.

The National Weather Service is predicting anywhere from 2 to 3 feet of snow along a 300-mile corridor that stretches from New Jersey to Maine. Wind gusts up to 60 miles per hour are also predicted.

"Snow, high winds and cold are a dangerous combination," Dr. Sampson Davis, an emergency medicine physician at Meadowlands Hospital Medical Center, in Secaucus, N.J., said in a hospital news release.

For starters, Davis advises, follow weather reports—and pay attention to the wind chill.

"With temperature drops, increased wind chill and inadequate clothing,

your body temperature can drop rapidly leading to hypothermia, frostbite and death. Extremely cold days are not a time to show your fashion best— rather it is important to wear multiple layers, including a hat," he said.

A great deal of temperature loss occurs through the head, Davis noted. "Children are especially vulnerable, so make sure to keep the hat, scarf and glove set handy. Also, a pair of thermals—or as my mother calls them, *long johns*—can go a long way in keeping your body heat in. Lastly, make sure to remove wet clothing immediately. The moisture in the clothing serves as an accelerator for heat loss," he said.

Also, be sure your home's heating systems, including the furnace and fireplace, and your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors have been checked and are working properly.

Use space heaters with extreme caution, Davis said, because they pose a risk of burns and fires.

"Most of the fires from space heaters occur at night while people are sleeping. Make sure to keep flammable objects away from the heaters and fireplace, and protect toddlers, crawling babies and pets by keeping these heating systems out of their reach," he said.

Never use a gas stove as a source of heat, Davis added. "The potential for [carbon monoxide](#) poisoning, which is both odorless and colorless, is increased when the gas is on," he warned.

Blizzard-coping plans should extend to your car, in case you become stranded. Have car emergency kits ready and handy. They should include flashlights, blankets, a first-aid kit, batteries, cat litter or sand for traction, a shovel, jumper cables, windshield washer fluid, an ice scraper, a fully charged cell phone and everyday medications.

If you have to shovel snow, Dr. Robert Gotlin, director of orthopedic and sports rehabilitation at Mount Sinai Beth Israel Hospital in New York City, offers this advice:

"Be sure to dress in layers. It is important for your lower back to be kept warm, but at the same time you may build up a lot of sweat from all the energy you expend. Layers are one solution," he said in a hospital news release.

Gotlin also warned against eating a big meal before going out to shovel. This can redirect blood in your veins to the stomach and away from the heart, he said.

He also recommends drinking at least one glass of water to maintain hydration. "While you may think it needs to be warm to get dehydrated, you actually expend so much [effort] during shoveling that water is essential for maintaining health," he explained.

Finally, while shoveling snow, don't bend your knees more than 90 degrees, Gotlin said. "A lot of us will think we need to bend lower to scoop more at one time. The snow is very heavy and the bending action will increase stress across the knee joint causing potential injury," he said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers more [winter health and safety tips](#).

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