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**STAY WARM WHATEVER THE WEATHER
Westchester County Offers Tips to Stay Safe in the Cold**

With the long-overdue arrival of very cold temperatures, the Westchester County Health Department is warning that residents caught unprepared may be at risk of hypothermia - a dangerous drop in body temperature that can lead to hospitalization or death.

Under the Westchester County Sanitary Code, rented accommodations must be heated whenever the outdoor temperature falls below 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Rented homes and apartments must be maintained at no less than 68 degrees Fahrenheit between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. During the overnight hours, from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., they must be kept at no less than 60 degrees Fahrenheit. If a rented accommodation is not being heated to the temperatures required under the Sanitary Code, tenants should first speak with the building manager or landlord. If that does not help, they should call the town building department or call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000.

“Hypothermia is not only dangerous, it can be fatal if not detected immediately and treated properly, said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Each year, about 37 people in New York State and nearly 700 people in the United States die of this condition, with infants, older adults, people who are ill, and those who work outdoors most at risk.”

Hypothermia occurs when a person’s core body temperature drops below normal to 95 degrees Fahrenheit or less. This condition results from remaining too cold for too long and may take hours, days or

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longer to develop. Hypothermia can occur even when temperatures are mild and is common among older people who live in homes that are too cold for their comfort.

Shivering is the body's first sign that it is struggling to keep warm. As your body temperature continues to drop, you may not be aware of the cold anymore. Hypothermia can deprive you of judgment and reasoning ability, because the cold affects brain functioning. Signs of possible hypothermia include confusion, drowsiness, slurred speech, and a change in appearance, such as a puffy face.

If you notice these signs in a person, wrap the individual in a blanket and take his or her temperature. If the person's temperature is 95 degrees or below, call an ambulance or take the individual to a hospital. Do not attempt to treat hypothermia at home.

Older people generate less body heat, since they have slower metabolisms and engage in less physical activity. The Westchester County Health Department recommends that people over 65 years of age and those with young children at home should set their homes' thermostats no lower than 65 degrees.

To help homebound seniors, the county's Department of Senior Programs and Services has already distributed prepared meals and canned food that can be heated up when needed. They have also given out portable battery-powered generators that can be used to power a lamp, a radio or a small heater, if the power goes out.

"We make sure that the elderly have what they need before cold weather comes," said Mae Carpenter, commissioner of the department of senior programs and services. Last year, the department distributed more than 600,000 meals to the elderly through nutrition centers and home deliveries.

"If there is no heat or the power goes out, residents should not use candles or stoves as sources of light and heat as they pose fire hazards and can generate carbon monoxide, a silent, deadly killer," said Anthony W. Sutton, Commissioner of the County's Department of Emergency Services. If their landlord won't fix the problem, they should call the Health Department, he said.

As always, residents should also check their smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to make sure they are working. Sutton also recommended that residents have an emergency kit in case they need to leave their homes. Emergency kits should include batteries, a flashlight, water, credit cards and cash, medications and emergency contacts. "If you ever have to leave your home, you need to be able to leave quickly," said Sutton. "Having an emergency kit ready is the best way to be prepared."

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The Health Department also offers the following suggestions for keeping warm, indoors and out, during the cold weather. Dress in layers. Many thin layers trap more heat than one thick layer.

- Keep moving. Exercise generates heat.
- Keep fueled. Food, especially sugars, provide calories for the body to burn.
- Avoid excessive caffeine and alcohol, which constrict blood vessels that bring heat to tissues.
- Drink hot fluids. These warm the body from the inside.
- Watch the kids. Young children should come inside to warm up every half-hour during subfreezing temperatures.
- Wear a hat. Between 60 and 80 percent of a person's body heat escapes through the head.

“Don’t stay cold,” said Dr. Lipsman. “If there is not enough heat in your home, put on more clothes, wear a jacket and hat, or wrap yourself in a blanket. Drink hot liquids, eat well, and keep moving. If you feel cold and don’t do anything to warm up, hypothermia can sneak up on you.”

For more information, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000, or visit the Health Department web site at www.westchestergov.com/health.