PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Pennsylvania Department of Health

Extreme Cold Forecasted for Pennsylvania – Practice Cold Safety

DATE:	**January 27, 2026**
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	**Extreme Cold Forecasted for Pennsylvania – Practice Cold Safety**
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	Statewide
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a "Health Advisory" which provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Summary:

- Extreme cold is forecasted for Pennsylvania from Tuesday, January 27 – Sunday, February 1, 2026.
- Exposure to extreme cold can cause multiple health effects including hypothermia and frostbite.
- Extreme cold may increase visits and calls to health care provider offices, visits to emergency departments, urgent care centers, and hospitalizations.
- There are multiple resources provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to educate providers and patients on the health risks of extreme cold and ways to reduce those risks.
- If you have any questions, please call DOH at 877-PA-HEALTH (877-724-3528) or your local health department.

Background

From January 27 – February 1, 2026, the National Weather Service (NWS) is forecasting extreme cold for Pennsylvania (PA). The coldest weather is expected to be in western PA, but all areas of PA will experience temperatures that are dangerously cold without appropriate precautions. Wind chill values near -20° Fahrenheit (F) are expected in western PA at times during the week, and all of PA is expected to experience wind chill values below 0°F. Wind chill is the combined effect of cold air and wind on the body. Temperatures will be the coldest during the night and early morning hours. This is expected to be the coldest weather of the winter season so far. Exposure to extreme cold can quickly cause multiple health effects, especially hypothermia and frostbite, and increase health care facility visits for cold-related illnesses. Medical providers in PA should be aware of this and subsequent cold weather events during patient visits in the winter. Additionally, people who are outside when or after snow and sleet has fallen are at increased risks of vehicle crashes, slips and falls, muscle injuries, and heart attacks while removing snow.

Cold Risks
Exposure to extreme cold poses serious risks for people and animals. Extreme cold and wind can make it difficult to stay warm, potentially leading to organ system failures and death. Providers should be aware of the following medical issues that can result from exposure to extreme cold:

Hypothermia– Occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95°F. If not treated, extreme cases may result in a significant drop in blood pressure, pulse rate, and breathing, collapse, and death.
Signs to look for include:

- uncontrollable shivering
- sensation of cold/cool skin
- irregular heartbeat
- weak pulse
- change in blood pressure
- slow and slurred speech
- memory lapse
- slow/irregular breathing
- fatigue
- pain in the extremities

Frostbite – Can occur with or without hypothermia when the hands, feet, and other body parts do not receive enough heat from the center of the body. If not treated, extreme cases may result in tissue loss (especially around areas of the nose, cheeks, ears, fingers, and toes), permanent loss of movement, and amputation. A wind chill of -20°F will cause frostbite in just 30 minutes.
Signs to look for include:

- cold, pale skin
- feeling of pins and needles or burning
- skin discoloration
- numbness of affected area
- blistering of affected area
- muscle and joint stiffness
- feeling of hard skin

Particularly Vulnerable Groups
Persons experiencing homelessness, outdoor workers, children, older adults, those removing snow, and those engaging in outdoor hobbies and recreation (skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, etc.).

Recommendations for Health Care Providers

- Providers should be aware and ask about exposure to extreme cold during medical visits.
- Providers should have a low threshold to evaluate all suspected cold-related illness.
- Providers should be aware of higher risk of carbon monoxide poisoning due to improper use or malfunction of generators or heating sources that produce fumes (such as kerosene heaters, fireplaces).
- Providers should be aware of higher risks from injuries due to vehicle crashes, falls from ice and snow, and risks of snow removal.
- Providers should direct patients to educational resources which provide instructions on how to avoid cold-related illness and injuries related to winter weather.

Recommendations for the Patients

- Stay indoors with heating if possible.
- Check on friends, family, neighbors, and pets.

- Consult with a health care provider if an illness might be related to cold exposure or contact 911 if experiencing a medical emergency.
- If using a space heater, make sure it is not near flammable materials (such as drapes and furniture).
- If using a heating device that creates fumes (such as fireplace or kerosene heater), make sure it is properly ventilated to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If using a power generator, make sure it is outside, at least 20 feet away from windows, doors, and vents, and protected from rain and snow to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning and fire risk.
- If turning on a vehicle or other device that produces exhaust (such as a snow blower), make sure it is not in a garage with the doors closed to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Cancel or postpone outdoor activities if possible.
- Research cold-related resources available in the local community; call 211 for assistance finding community resources that may be available.
- If being outside is necessary, go during the warmest time of day, wear multiple layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing, cover exposed skin, take frequent breaks in warm areas, and use a buddy system if possible.
- If shoveling snow, take it slow, take breaks, and push snow rather than lift it.
- If travel is necessary, prepare and keep a winter survival kit in vehicle, including warm clothes, blankets, flashlights, and snacks. Be sure to inform others of travel plans.
- Check a trusted weather forecaster, such as the National Weather Service, for the latest updates.

Resources

- PA DOH | Extreme Cold Safety Information
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) | Winter Weather Safety Information
- NWS | Winter Weather Safety Information
- Ready.gov | Winter Weather Safety Information
- Ready PA | Winter Weather Safety Information
- Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA) | Winter Weather Safety Information

If you have additional questions about this guidance, please contact DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department.

Individuals interested in receiving PA-HANs are encouraged to register at HAN Notification Registration (mir3.com)

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of January 27, 2026, but may be modified in the future.