



January is a Time for.....

Tips on Keeping Safe in Winter

By Alice Robeson, MPH

Ontario County is in upstate New York, where winter snow is usually a fact of life. We can make this season safer and more enjoyable by planning ahead.

Just as you need to prepare yourself for winter's weather, you also need to prepare your car. Be sure your tires are in good shape and have plenty of tread. If you travel in areas with persistent snowfall, you may want to consider investing in snow tires. Whatever tires you have, regularly check tire pressures: temperature can make them soft. Keep the gas tank at least half-full. You may also want to use "dry gas" or a similar product as an additive in the gas tank to prevent water in gas from freezing in the fuel line when temperatures drop and wind-chills are high. Get your car "winterized". Then keep it running smoothly by adding antifreeze as needed. Car batteries are also susceptible to cold weather – if yours is running low, it would be a good time to replace it. Check out your windshield wipers and get new ones if they are worn. Special winter blades are designed so that so snow and/or ice won't build up on the blade arm.

Be sure to fully clean off your car when it is covered by ice and snow. Trying to clear windshields by turning on the wipers can burn out the wiper motors. They are designed to keep the windshields clean – not to get them clear of heavy snow and ice. Also, be sure to clean off your headlights and brake lights so that other drivers can see you clearly. Don't forget to sweep off the roof, too. Melting snow on the roof can slip over the windshield and blind your view while driving.



Driving on snow and ice can be challenging. Have a winter car kit containing the following items:

- ☞ A shovel
- ☞ Snow scraper and brush or broom
- ☞ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ☞ Flares
- ☞ First aid kit
- ☞ Finger food like granola bars, cereal, dried fruits etc.
- ☞ Drinking water
- ☞ A can and matches for additional drinking water from melting snow
- ☞ Extra windshield washer fluid
- ☞ Blankets or sleeping bags
- ☞ Warm clothes including hats and gloves
- ☞ A brightly colored cloth or scarf to tie on the outside of your car to increase its visibility
- ☞ Items for your special needs: medications, food and diapers for a baby, etc.
- ☞ Sand, cat litter and/or rock salt to help to free you up



No one ever expects to be stranded, but it can happen. These supplies, coupled with a charged cell phone, can buy you time and let you notify authorities if the roads or the car, do get the best of you.

One important note: Don't leave your car unless staying there poses an immediate danger!

Your car does offer some protection from the elements and it is a bigger “target” to search for than a person on foot. It is also okay to leave the dome light on when it is dark. It uses very little power and can help rescuers find you.

It is okay to run the engine and heater briefly to warm things up, but don't leave them on continuously. And check first to be sure that the exhaust pipe is not blocked by snow or ice. If the air inside the car gets stale, open the window away from the wind for just a few moments.

Your home also needs a winter makeover. Really, it is important to be prepared year round for any emergencies that might arise. Be sure to have plenty of food and water available to use in the case of a major storm. Water lines can freeze, so pre-filling containers with drinking water is a good idea. Keep your faucets running at a slow rate to decrease the risk of pipes freezing. If your pipes do freeze, re-heat them gently – torches damage the water system, but hair driers can come in handy.



Make sure that your heating system is in good repair. Portable heaters can be dangerous for children and pets. Wood burning stoves and fireplaces need to be cleaned out and chimneys checked throughout the winter. The more you use them, the more frequently they should be checked. Make sure they are properly ventilated to avoid any risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Most heaters are designed for just one type of fuel, so don't substitute. Never use outdoor grills inside – their fumes are deadly! Generators also need to be kept outside!

Keep space heaters on the floor – they can cause serious burns if they topple over on a child or a pet. Also, keep them at least three feet away from furniture or other flammable objects.

A battery-operated radio is a good investment. Electricity may go out, so have plenty of flashlights in places where you can easily find them. You can also use candles, but they pose a much greater fire risk. Never leave candles unattended. If your heat is electric, consider what your back-up plan will be if the power goes out.

Above all, be safe and happy this season, and remember always...**Choose Health Ontario!**