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NJOEM's Winter Weather Awareness Week: Wind Chill, Frostbite and Hypothermia

(TRENTON, NJ) – Colonel Rick Fuentes, Superintendent of New Jersey State Police and Director of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, is celebrating Winter Weather Awareness Week beginning today and ending Friday.

Each day will bring a new message for family preparedness during the winter months.

Today's message: **Wind Chill, Frostbite and Hypothermia.**

What is Wind Chill?

Extreme cold can remain even after a winter storm has passed. Prolonged exposure can cause life-threatening frostbite or hypothermia. Infants and the elderly are the most susceptible, but everyone should take basic precautions.

Beyond the actual temperature, wind chill demonstrates the way wind and cold combine to affect exposed skin. As the wind speed increases, heat leaches away from the body at an increased rate, driving down the body temperature. The National Weather Service Wind Chill Chart at <http://www.weather.gov/om/windchill/index.shtml> indicates how quickly the wind and cold can cause frostbite.

The following information on hypothermia and frostbite is adapted from information by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For more, go to <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/faq.asp>

What is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature, results when the body starts losing heat faster than it is produced. Hypothermia can affect the brain, making it difficult for the victim to think clearly or move well, or even to know they are in danger.

Hypothermia symptoms include uncontrolled shivering, memory loss, disorientation, and drowsiness. Warning signs in infants include bright red, cold skin and very low energy. If you notice these signs, take person's temperature. If below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, seek medical help immediately.

If medical care is not available:

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing.
- Warm the center of the body first, including chest, head, neck and groin, using an electric blanket if available. Or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but DO NOT give alcoholic beverages. DO NOT try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- Keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including head and neck.
- Individuals with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or be breathing. CPR should be provided until the person is being warmed, until the person responds or medical help becomes available. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

What is Frostbite?

Frostbite is damage to body tissue caused by extreme cold.

Symptoms include numbness and a pale color in extremities, such as fingers, toes, earlobes or the nose. Skin may feel unusually firm or waxy. If you detect these symptoms, get medical help immediately and slowly warm the affected areas.

If medical care is not available:

- Get into a warm room as quickly as possible.
- NEVER rub or massage frostbitten skin, especially not with snow. This can cause more damage.
- Unless absolutely necessary, NEVER walk on frostbitten feet or toes. This can cause more damage.
- Warm affected areas with warm, NOT HOT, water. Or use body heat - for example, placing hands under armpits.
- DO NOT use a heating pad, heat lamp or the heat of a stove, fireplace or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

Family Preparedness

Children and adults should follow these winter safety tips:

- During a snowstorm, stay inside.
- When you go out after a storm, dress in layers. Many layers of thin clothing are better than a single layer of thick clothing. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water repellent and hooded.
- Most body heat is lost through the top of the head, so always wear a hat and earmuffs.

- Mittens are better than gloves, because fingers maintain more warmth when they touch each other.
- A scarf worn over your mouth will protect your lungs from extreme cold.
- Come inside often for warm-up breaks.
- When working outdoors, slow down and take frequent breaks to avoid overexertion. Cold weather an additional strain on the heart. If you feel chest pain, stop and seek help immediately.
- If you shiver uncontrollably or get very tired, or if your nose, fingers, toes or earlobes start to feel numb or turn pale, come inside right away and seek medical help. These are warning signs of hypothermia and frostbite, as described above.

Family Preparedness

For New Jersey residents, the basics of preparedness for nor'easters and winter flooding are virtually the same as preparedness for all hazards, natural or manmade:

- **FIRST:** Arm yourself and your family members with an **Emergency Supply Kit** and an **Emergency Action Plan**.
 - Your **Emergency Supply Kit** should include a blanket, a battery-powered radio, a first aid kit, one week's prescription medications, personal toiletries, infant care items, three days' worth of non-perishable food and water (one gallon of water per person per day), a can opener, and cash or travelers checks. For more, visit the American Red Cross website: www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/fds-all.pdf.
 - Your **Emergency Action Plan** should include an out-of-town contact your family members call or email to check on each other, a predetermined meeting place away from your home, a specific plans for individuals with special needs or disabilities. For more, visit the American Red Cross website: www.redcross.org/static/file_cont36_lang0_23.pdf.
- **NEXT:** Pay attention to **weather media and your local radio or television stations for weather updates** and for **official instructions** from **Public Safety Officials**.
- **If you live in an area prone to flooding: Know your evacuation route.** You can find maps of New Jersey's coastal evacuation routes at the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management's website, www.state.nj.us/njoem. In all areas, call local Emergency Management officials or Police Department for details on your evacuation plan.

Further information on all-hazards preparedness for families can be found at the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management's website, www.state.nj.us/njoem.

Similar information can be found in "Plain Talk on Terrorism Preparedness," available from the New Jersey Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force at www.njhomelandsecurity.com/Plain-Talk-12.08.04.pdf; and in "Ready Together New Jersey," from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, at <http://www.njhomelandsecurity.com/ready-together-brochure.html>.

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