



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

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Acting Commissioner

2026 Health Alert #3

Protect People at Risk of Cold-Related Death During Prolonged Cold Temperatures

Please distribute to all clinical staff in emergency medicine, family medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry, pharmacy, and primary care; as well as outreach providers and community health workers.

- NYC is experiencing a prolonged spell of freezing temperatures. Prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures indoors and outside can lead to health risks.
- Medical providers should advise people to check on friends, family, and neighbors to avoid prolonged exposure to cold indoors and outside temperatures
- When seeing individuals experiencing homelessness, medical providers should encourage them to access the New York City shelter system, Drop-in Centers, or warming centers to escape the cold.
- Healthcare facilities should **not** discharge any unhoused individuals who do not have a confirmed place to stay.
- Outreach workers should be alert for signs and symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Landlords are required to provide heat and hot water. Remind people who rent to report loss of heat or hot water to building management, and to call 311 if the problem is not quickly addressed.
- Provide information about financial resources to individuals or contacts who have trouble paying heating bills.

February 4, 2026

Our city is currently experiencing prolonged freezing temperatures which is linked to multiple deaths as of February 4th, 2026. This extended cold spell is expected to continue through the weekend of February 7-8 and into next week. While most people who die of hypothermia are exposed outdoors, not all of whom experience homelessness, people with inadequate heat at home can also fall ill or die from cold exposure.

Providers can direct people experiencing homelessness to [Drop-in-Centers](#) and NYC warming centers, found here: [Warming Centers · NYC311](#).

Encourage people who do not have adequate heat to visit a [warming center](#) or to stay with family, friends, or neighbors.

People who are most likely to be affected by cold weather include:

- People who are unhoused and not in shelters
- People drinking alcohol or using substances who experience prolonged sedation while outdoors
- People who live in homes without heat AND:
 - Are 60 years or older
 - Have serious mental illness or developmental disabilities
 - Have chronic medical problems such as heart disease, breathing problems or diabetes
 - Are socially isolated, have limited mobility or are unable to leave the house
 - Drink alcohol or use substances

Remind people of their rights and the resources available to them, including:

- **Building owners are legally required to provide heat and hot water to their tenants.** Any loss of heat or hot water should be reported immediately to the building superintendent, property manager or owner. If the problem is not swiftly addressed, call 311 to report the issue.
 - Utility companies are not allowed to shut off service for non-payment for any residential customer when temperatures are very cold.
 - Contact your utility company or 311 to report loss of service.
- For those who are energy insecure, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) provides low-income homeowners and renters [emergency heating assistance](#) through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). Regular and emergency heating assistance is available. People can visit HRA's website to see if they qualify and to apply: [Energy Assistance - HRA](#)
- **Don't use an oven to heat a home.** If using a space heater, plug it directly into a wall outlet and do not leave it unattended to reduce risk of fire.
- Encourage people who do not have adequate heat to visit a [warming center](#) or to stay with family, friends, or neighbors.
- If going outside, dress warmly in layers. Inadequate or wet clothing can increase risk during cold weather.

Recommendations for Outreach Providers and Community Health Workers:

- **Call 911 to get medical help if someone is experiencing hypothermia, which is a medical emergency.** Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, slurred speech, sluggishness, drowsiness, unusual behavior, confusion, dizziness, and shallow breathing. Several factors increase the risk of hypothermia including inadequate or wet clothing and exposed skin touching the ground.
- People who use alcohol and drugs, especially outdoors, are at increased risk of experiencing hypothermia and frostbite.

- Drinking alcohol can make someone feel warmer but can reduce their body temperature.
- Sedation from the use of opioids, particularly when they are mixed with non-opioid sedatives like xylazine or medetomidine, can increase the risk of cold exposure for people who use drugs outside
- If someone is not breathing, initiate overdose response protocol by calling 911, administering naloxone, and providing rescue breaths until EMS arrives.
- During outreach, direct people to available indoor warming spaces and Drop-in Centers. A list of warming centers can be found on 311's website by borough, [here](#).
- Programs and healthcare centers that operate drop-in spaces should make their space as available as possible to people experiencing street homelessness or insufficient heat in their homes.

Immediately report deaths where cold exposure is suspected as a direct or contributing cause to the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

Sincerely,



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