

Health and Wellness Tips – February 2016/March 2016 Winter Safety

Now that the holidays are over, we are settling in for a long, cold New England winter. Being prepared is the best way to stay safe and maintain optimal health through these cold months.

There are many good references for winter safety and preparedness. The State of New Hampshire has an emergency preparedness website: <http://www.readynh.gov/>. There are recommendations to form a “Family Emergency Plan”. This is a plan that involves planning with all family members and is a tool to reconnect in the event of a major weather emergency or disaster.

Another recommendation from this same source is to put together an emergency kit. At a minimum have on hand at least three days of non-perishable food, water and medications. Other suggestions for the kit include a NOAA radio, flashlight and batteries, personal hygiene items, a first aid kit, a whistle, a manual can opener, copies of important documents, blankets and towels, change of clothes, durable weather-proof container, a generator and food for pets.

If forced to use an alternative form of heat, use extreme caution for carbon monoxide exposure. Heating units that are made to be used outdoors cannot be used inside. This can cause a quick build-up of carbon monoxide fumes that can be deadly. The following are signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Dull headache
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Confusion
- Blurred vision
- Loss of consciousness

Immediate emergency medical attention should be sought by dialing 911 if carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected.

In addition to emergency preparedness, basic precautions should be taken for safe day to day living in the winter. Prevent falls by having snow and ice removed from walkways, driveways and entrances. Sand or salt should be applied to slippery spots. Prevent frostbite and hypothermia when out in extreme temperatures by wearing warm layers and covering exposed skin. Wear sensible warm footwear to prevent falls and frostbite to feet.

It is not too late to get the flu shot! The flu typically peaks in February and is often seen as late as May. If you have not yet received your vaccine, please contact your primary care provider. The flu shot is also given at many pharmacies.

Service animals and family pets are also vulnerable to the cold. Please do not leave an animal outside in the cold for prolonged periods and never overnight. Keep animals dry in the winter. If the natural fur coat is not heavy, an animal may require a coat to wear for longer periods outside. If the animal’s foot pads are noted to be cracked and dry, apply a small amount of petroleum jelly a couple of times a day.

Have a safe and happy winter!

Sources

<http://www.readynh.gov/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/carbonmonoxide/basics/symptoms>

<https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/news/keeping-pets-safe-cold-weather>

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>