

Alexandria CERT: Community Emergency Response Team

Police – Fire – Medical Emergency	911
Alexandria Non-Emergency	703-746-4444
Alexandria Animal Control	703-746-4774
National Poison Control Center	800-222-1222
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800-273-8255

November -
December 2020

Winter Weather

Winter storms can bring snow, sleet, and icing. Other winter weather hazards are cold temperatures, strong winds, freezing rain, and flooding. Winter weather can affect people's health, such as difficulty breathing very cold air, or, more seriously, lead to hypothermia or frostbite. The weather can also cause hazardous driving conditions or power outages. Monitor weather forecasts and make plans based on the expected weather conditions.

Advisories, Watches, and Warnings. The National Weather Service issues general winter weather advisories, watches, and warnings. The National Weather Service also provides specific warnings for blizzards, ice storms, and snow squalls. An advisory means at least two winter weather conditions are occurring, likely, or imminent, with some accumulation possible in the next 12 to 24 hours. The conditions may cause significant inconvenience or potentially endanger life and/or property. A watch is issued for heavy snow, freezing rain, sleet, and strong winds with significant accumulations possible within 24 to 48 hours. A winter storm warning is for hazardous conditions that pose or will pose a threat to life and/or property within the next 12 to 48 hours. The warning may specify the hazard, such as heavy snow or heavy sleet.

Snow and Sleet. Snow storms can produce light to heavy amounts of heavy snow and/or sleet. A snow squall is an extremely intense snow event that produces sudden whiteout conditions with strong winds. A squall typically lasts 30 to 60 minutes and may be accompanied by falling temperatures and icy roads. A blizzard can last up to 3 hours or more and, like a snow squall, has blowing snow and whiteout conditions.

Sleet is ice pellets made of frozen raindrops or refrozen melted snowflakes. Graupel is another term for soft hail or snow pellets.

Ice and Freezing Rain. Ice storms and freezing rain cause slick conditions for both walking and driving. During an ice storm, ¼ to ½ inch or more of freezing rain accumulates on bridges, roads, or walkways.

Flooding. Heavy rain, snow melt, or ice jams in winter or early spring can cause flooding. When chunks of ice build up and prevent water from flowing downstream, water levels can rise rapidly either upstream or downstream. Never drive through flood waters. More than half of all flood fatalities are vehicle-related.

Winter Tips

Prepare. Check the latest forecast and plan accordingly based on the expected weather conditions. Be sure to dress appropriately if you go outside. Dress in 2-3 layers with an outer layer that protects against wind and wet snow, waterproof boots, warm hat, mittens or gloves, and a face mask for extreme cold.

Driving. Avoid traveling if warnings are issued. Have a winter survival kit in your vehicle in any case. Basic vehicle kit items are a windshield scraper and shovel, extra warm clothes, a blanket, food and water, your cell phone and a charger, and a flashlight. Other items are emergency flares plus sand, cat litter, or chains to provide traction.

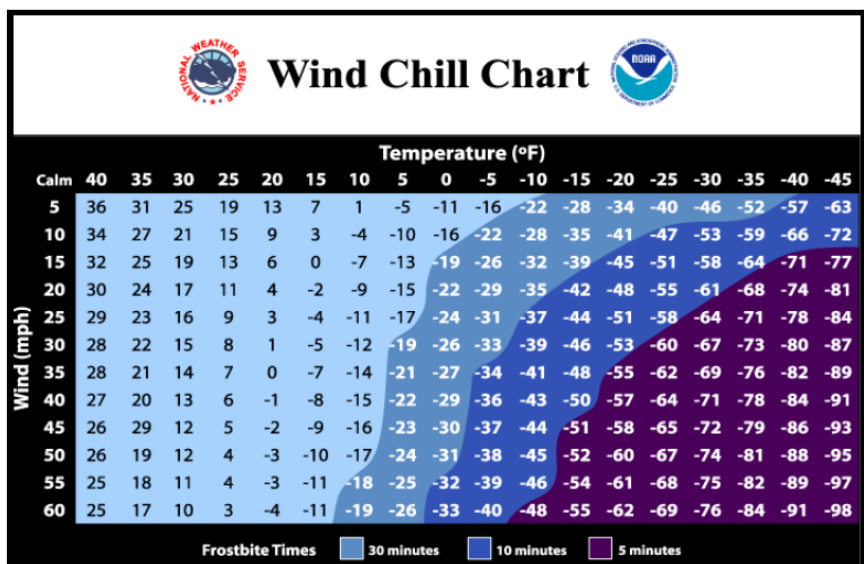
Shovel and Salt. Shovel snow from your steps, sidewalks, and driveway or sprinkle salt if it is icy. Salt also melts thick snow. Shoveling snow requires strenuous exertion, which can trigger a heart attack. If you have chest pain or trouble breathing, call 911.

Check on Neighbors. Call neighbors to see if they are okay, particularly seniors, disabled persons, or other others living alone. They may suffer from hypothermia or carbon monoxide poisoning if there's an extended power outage.

Cold Temperatures and Wind

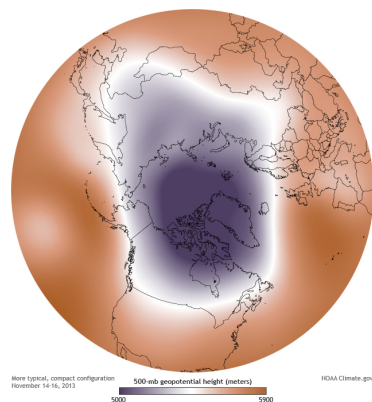
The National Weather Service will change terminology in 2021. The single term Extreme Cold Warning will combine both extreme cold warning and wind chill warning. The terms wind chill advisory and wind chill watch will apparently continue to be used.

The NWS Wind Chill Temperature index gauges dangers of frostbite from winter winds and freezing temperatures. It shows how quickly frostbite can occur based on temperature and wind speed. Besides frostbite, exposure to extreme cold can cause hypothermia or even death. Note that risks of frostbite and hypothermia are for average adults. Risks are greater for children, for adults with low blood sugar, poor circulation, or anorexia, and for those who are on certain medications or who are elderly.



The dangerously cold wind chill values often arise from arctic air combined with brisk winds. On weather reports, we often hear about the “polar vortex.” It is a large area of low pressure and cold air that is weak in the summer and stronger in the winter. In winter, the polar vortex can expand, sending cold air southward with the jet stream.

Polar Vortex



Flash Freeze. When a cold front moves in and the temperature drops quickly or simply when the temperature drops overnight, wet roads and sidewalks may freeze quickly, making conditions hazardous.

Hypothermia and Frostbite

Exposure to cold for long periods can result in hypothermia or frostbite.

Prevention. Outdoors: Limit time outside, dress in layers, and cover exposed skin.

Indoors: Keep the temperature warm enough, especially for vulnerable persons.

Hypothermia. This occurs when someone’s core temperature is below 95° F. It causes mental confusion. Seek medical care immediately. In mild cases, the person shivers; their speech may slur, they may feel exhausted or drowsy. In moderate cases, they cannot shiver, and in severe cases they become unconscious and may suffer cardiac arrest.

Provide CPR even if the person appears dead. Move the person to a warm place such as inside or in a vehicle. Remove all wet clothing. Warm the center of the body first (chest, groin, head, neck). If the person is conscious, give warm beverages.

Frostbite. To protect vital inner organs, the body limits circulation to feet, hands, nose, etc. The affected body part feels numb. Skin appears white or grayish yellow and may feel waxy or unusually firm. If frostbite is severe, permanent damage occurs; gangrene is a threat. Treat the person for hypothermia first. Gently warm the affected areas, but don’t use hot water or get near a heater. Remove any tight jewelry such as rings. Don’t rub or massage the skin – this causes more damage. Don’t walk on frostbitten toes or feet.