

*Feb. 13, 2014*

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

***For More Information Contact***

***Maribeth Brewster, 804-652-5997,***

***[maribeth.brewster@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:maribeth.brewster@vdh.virginia.gov)***

**Virginians Urged To Take Precautions After Winter Storm**

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) encourages everyone to protect themselves against serious health problems that can result from prolonged exposure to the cold and overexertion.

“Whether digging out from the wet, heavy snow brought by the recent winter storm or sledding and playing in it,” said Interim State Health Commissioner Marissa J. Levine, MD, MPH, “everyone should take precautions to stay healthy and safe.”  
To lower your risk:

- Wear cold weather appropriate clothing like gloves/mittens, hats, scarves and snow boots. Dress in several layers of loose-fitting clothing and cover your face and mouth if possible.
- Stay dry, and if you become wet, remove any wet clothing immediately.
- Limit your time outdoors.
- Monitor children playing in the snow; they often don’t understand they might be in trouble.
- Do not ignore shivering. It’s an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.
- Avoid falls! Walk slowly and cautiously on icy surfaces and packed snow.
- Work slowly to avoid exertion and to prevent back injury.
- Use teams of two or more to move bulky objects. Avoid lifting any material that weighs more than 50 pounds.
- Use caution or seek professional assistance when removing fallen trees, cleaning up debris or using equipment, such as chain saws.
- Wear eye goggles while removing or cleaning up debris to prevent eye injuries. Wear earplugs to prevent hearing loss when using power equipment.
- If the heat in your home doesn’t work properly, contact your local government or 211 to find out if there is a warming center near you.

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body. Severe cases may result in digit or limb amputation. At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin. Any of the following signs may indicate frostbite: a white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy and numbness. The person is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb. If you suspect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care.

Hypothermia is an abnormally low body temperature caused when your body is losing heat faster than it can be produced. Warning signs may include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech or drowsiness. In infants, warning signs may include bright red, cold skin or very low energy. If you notice signs of hypothermia, take the person's temperature. If the temperature is below 95 degrees, it's an emergency; seek medical attention immediately.

Additional information on dealing with winter weather is available from VDH at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/weather/ColdWeatherSafety.htm> and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>.

-end-