



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
November 5, 2019

**CONTACT:**  
Mike Matulis 217-785-1719 (IDOL)  
Rebecca Clark 217-557-4756 (IEMA)

## **State Agencies Encourage People to Prepare for Winter Weather**

### *November is Winter Weather Preparedness Month in Illinois*

SPRINGFIELD – While the official start of winter is not for several weeks, parts of Illinois have already experienced the first snowfall of the season. The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Department of Labor and the National Weather Service (NWS) are encouraging people to begin preparing now for extreme cold, snow and ice.

“In Illinois, it’s not a question of if, but rather when will snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures occur,” **said Acting IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau**. “Being unprepared for winter weather is not only inconvenient, but it can be dangerous. That’s why we are encouraging all Illinoisans to take a few minutes to put together your home and vehicle emergency supply kits and review the steps you should take to stay safe during hazardous winter weather.”

In terms of weather, 2019 has been a record-breaking year in Illinois. The new year brought a Polar Vortex that crippled most of the Midwest, including blanketing Illinois with life-threatening temperatures for several days. According to the NWS, the coldest temperature on record occurred this year (January 31) when the mercury dropped to negative 38 degrees near Mt. Carroll in Carroll County. The previous record of negative 36 degrees was set in 1999.

From 2008-2018, there were 788 fatalities related to cold temperatures in Illinois, which is more than heat (227), tornadoes (23), floods (38) and severe storms/lightning (17) combined. In the United States, about 700 deaths occur each year from hypothermia. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk of hypothermia.

“There are several dangerous health conditions that can occur specifically in winter weather,” **said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “It’s important to watch for signs of extreme cold. Hypothermia, when a person’s body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, can occur both outdoors and indoors and can be fatal. Frostbite occurs when your extremities (fingers, toes, nose, and ears) are exposed to cold weather. The skin may

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become stiff and numb leading to severe tissue damage. Also, watch for symptoms of chest pain when shoveling snow which can be associated with overexertion. Know the warning signs of dangerous cold weather health conditions in order to stay safe and healthy during the winter.”

Unfortunately, no matter how low the temperature dips, many Illinois workers will face the frigid elements to do their jobs. Cold weather is never pleasant, but by taking some precautions, workers can minimize the dangers.

“Freezing, snowy weather is a fact of life in Illinois during the winter, and some people feel they can tough it out,” **said Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik.** “But if you’re required to work outdoors, you’re tempting fate by not dressing properly on frigid days.”

Caution and self-awareness are the keys to cold weather safety. Workers should know the signs of hypothermia, not push their bodies to an extreme, layer clothing and make sure they have plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

“The signs of danger initially may be subtle but once they hit, they can hit like a snowplow,” **said Mitch Rogers, administrator for Memorial Health System’s Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Services in Springfield.**

Preventative maintenance is also a good idea. Rogers suggests people who must work outside regularly in the winter weather consider scheduling a physical exam before that winter work begins.

To help Illinois residents prepare for winter, IEMA and the NWS developed a winter weather preparedness guide that covers winter weather terms and tips for staying safe at home, in the car and at school. The guide is available on the Ready Illinois website at [www.Ready.Illinois.gov](http://www.Ready.Illinois.gov).

“Preparing well in advance of winter weather is really the best way to cope when snow, ice and cold temperatures affect us,” **said Chris Miller, Warning Coordination Meteorologist with the NWS office in Lincoln.** “Now is the time to prepare your vehicle and house for winter conditions. Make sure you have blankets, non-perishable food, boots, extra clothing and other items in your car in case you are stranded or waiting for a tow. At home, make sure you have enough essential items to ride out a storm, or if you are without power, for at least three days.”

For more information about winter weather preparedness, including the *Weathering Winter* guide from the Illinois Department of Public Health, visit the Ready Illinois website at [www.Ready.Illinois.gov](http://www.Ready.Illinois.gov).