



Senior Care Today

From **Mount Vernon Nursing and Rehabilitation Center**

Winter Safety for Seniors *Planning for the Unanticipated*

While the danger associated with winter weather varies greatly across the country, the majority of us will have to face severe winter conditions at some point in our lives. This may mean coping with freezing temperatures, snow and ice, strong winds or heavy downpours of sleet or rain. Not only does winter weather pose obvious outdoor safety hazards, any, or all of, these conditions may cause the loss of electrical power, heat and communications services, sometimes for days at a time.

In fact, such weather events are often referred to as “deceptive killers” because of the many fatalities that result indirectly from traffic accidents on icy roads, heart attacks while shoveling snow or prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures.

While winter weather affects everyone, seniors are particularly vulnerable. If you or someone you love is elderly, it is extremely important to be well prepared for the winter weather before it strikes.

With that goal in mind, we have devoted the latest issue of *Senior Care Today* to a discussion of winter safety for seniors, with a special emphasis on planning for the unexpected and unanticipated. In addition to the more widely recognized preparations and precautions, many of our planning tips consider that your loved ones will likely have to deal with severe weather conditions without your direct assistance. After all, how often is your entire family together under ordinary circumstances? When a sudden storm strikes, chances are the likelihood of being under one roof is even less.

We hope you find this issue of interest and of real value as winter is just around the corner.

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Mount Vernon Nursing & Rehabilitation Center is a locally owned and operated 130-bed skilled and intermediate nursing facility that has served the Alexandria/Mount Vernon community for over 25 years. Conveniently located between Alexandria and Mount Vernon, it is part of a medical community including physicians' offices and the Mount Vernon Hospital.

Developing a Winter Weather Communications Plan

Preparing an older family member for a winter storm or other severe weather conditions requires effective planning on several levels. One of the most important goals is developing an effective communications plan. Here are some suggestions:

Identify and Inform your Support Network

Since families are often separated during severe weather events, make a list of friends, neighbors and care providers who will be part of your personal support network.

- Exchange phone numbers and other contact information
- Request that neighbors visit in the event of a storm to check-in on your loved ones and provide any help necessary
- Make sure that at least one member of your network has a spare key to your loved one's home and knows where emergency supplies are stored

Create a Family Contact Chain

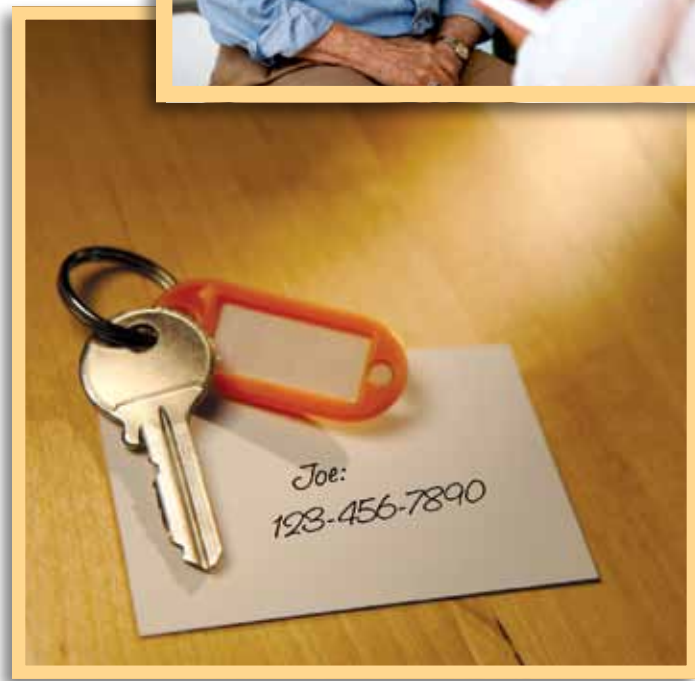
Plan how you will contact other family members and determine what you will do in various situations.

- Establish a phone or email sequence in which each family member contacts a specific friend or relative in the event of a winter emergency
- Include an out-of-town family member among your contacts, since being out of the impacted area, he or she may be in a better position to communicate among separated relatives

Talk to Medical Providers

If your loved one receives regular medical treatments or services at a local hospital or through a home care agency, talk to the service provider about continuing care during winter emergencies.

- Identify back-up providers in the community
- If a senior uses medical equipment in the home, review what you can do to prepare in the event of power outages



Useful utility tip #1...

Keep your electric, gas and water providers' emergency phone numbers posted near your own telephone.

Useful utility tip #2...

Notify your electric company if your loved one uses a respirator or other life-sustaining equipment. The provider will advise you of the steps to take in the event of a power outage.

Useful utility tip #3...

If a storm is predicted, fill the bathtub with water. It can be used for purposes other than drinking, such as washing and flushing toilets.

Useful utility tip #4...

Clearly mark turn-off switches and valves for electric, gas and water supplies and have appropriate tools on hand.



Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow

When severe weather hits, seniors need to be prepared to go it alone, perhaps for several days. In these instances, having a well-stocked and well prepared “kit” of supplies on hand can help make the situation safer and more comfortable.

Start building your kit with the basic supplies and information:

- Bottled water, at least 1 gallon per person per day for 3 to 7 days
- Non-perishable packaged or canned food sufficient to last from 3 to 7 days (remember to include a pair of scissors and a can opener)
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Battery powered radio and clock
- First aid kit
- Disposable plastic plates, cups and utensils
- Chemical light sticks
- Toiletries and moisture wipes
- Pet food and extra water for household pets
- Sleeping bags or extra blankets
- Paper and pencils
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Rock salt to melt ice on walkways
- Sand to improve traction

- Snow shovels
- Fully charged cell phone (it is a good idea to also have one standard telephone handset in the home which does not require electricity to operate)
- A list of contact numbers for your family and support networks, as well as medical providers
- Copies of medical insurance and Medicare documents
- Fire extinguisher

It is equally important to take stock of your loved one’s individual needs and consider how a winter emergency might affect them. Based on your specific situation, your kit may also include:

- A supply of prescription medications that can last at least a week (include copies of written prescriptions from doctors)
- Extra eyeglasses, hearing aids and batteries
- Wheelchair batteries
- Supplies of oxygen
- Personal hygiene items



Look, Listen, Learn and Be Safe

While we hear them almost every day during the winter months, many of us do not fully understand the many terms and designations that are applied to winter weather conditions. Fortunately, that situation is easily remedied. Gaining just a little more knowledge in this area can make a big difference in your ability to prepare properly and reduce or avoid the impact of a potentially dangerous winter event or period of severe weather.

- **A WINTER STORM WATCH** means a winter storm is possible in your area. It is generally issued 12 to 48 hours prior to the possible event.
- **A WINTER STORM WARNING** indicates that hazardous weather, with heavy snow, freezing rain or sleet is imminent and will arrive within a 12 to 24 hour period.
- **A BLIZZARD WARNING** forecasts winds of 35 mph or more, blinding wind-driven snow and dangerous wind chill temperatures that should persist for at least 3 hours. This warning signals the need to seek shelter immediately.

- **A WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY** is used when a mixture of snow, freezing rain and sleet will cause significant inconveniences and, if caution is not exercised, could lead to life-threatening situations.
- **WIND CHILL** is the temperature the body “feels” based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin caused by the combined effects of wind and air temperature. As the wind increases, heat is carried away more quickly, forcing down the body’s temperature.
- **A WIND CHILL ADVISORY** comes when wind chill temperatures are expected to present significant inconveniences to daily life and prolonged exposure could be hazardous to your health.
- **A WIND CHILL WARNING** is issued when the wind chill temperatures could be life-threatening within several minutes of exposure.

You and your loved ones can keep abreast of local winter weather forecasts and developments by listening to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Weather Radio, viewing specialized cable television programming such as *The Weather Channel*, or going online to www.weather.com.



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