



STATE OF NEW YORK  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

161 Delaware Avenue

Delmar, NY 12054-1393

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr. P.H.  
*Commissioner*

Dennis P. Whalen  
*Executive Deputy Commissioner*

November 15, 2005

DAL/DQS #05-17  
Subject: Cold Weather Advisory

Dear Administrator:

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the New York State Department of Health's expectations in ensuring that residents are comfortable and safe in nursing homes throughout the winter months.

Both New York State (10NYCRR 415.5) and Federal (42.CFR 48315) regulations require residential health care facilities to maintain comfortable and safe temperature levels within their facilities. For those residents who might be leaving the facility for any reason including outside visits or community events, facilities must assure that any health or safety issues associated with cold weather have been assessed and addressed.

During the winter months many residents may be at risk for cold-related illnesses. Elderly residents and those with health problems such as diabetes, circulatory or thyroid disease are at risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Hypothermia is a drop in one's body temperature below 96 degrees, and it can occur when exposure to the cold causes a person's body to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Frostbite is a decrease in blood flow to a person's extremities due to exposure to extreme cold, resulting in freezing of the skin.

Hypothermia can occur with air temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit (15-18 degrees Celsius). The present regulations contained in Part 711 and Sub-Parts 713-1 and 713-2 require nursing homes to be equipped with a heating system capable of maintaining all resident areas at a minimum temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. This does not require that all occupied areas must be kept at 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Nursing homes should be cognizant of the needs and wishes of each resident and ensure that a safe and appropriate temperature is provided.

The Department expects that all residents will be safe during the cold winter months. Enclosed are three informational bulletins. The first lists symptoms of cold-related illnesses, the second lists easy steps to prevent cold-related illnesses, and the third is a list of the steps that all nursing homes must follow. You must make this information available and post these informational materials in a conspicuous area accessible to residents, families and staff.

If you have further questions regarding any portion of this letter or the enclosures, please contact Denise Brelia-Hyland of my staff at 518-408-1282.

Thank you for your continued efforts to maintain the health and safety of those who reside in nursing homes in New York State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith W. Servis".

Keith W. Servis, Director  
Division of Quality & Surveillance  
for Nursing Homes and ICFs/MR

New York State Department of Health  
Office of Health Systems Management

**Symptoms of Cold Exposure & Treatment**

<b>Cold Related Illness</b>	<b>Signs &amp; Symptoms</b>	<b>Treatment</b>
Hypothermia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shivering</li><li>• Confusion</li><li>• Memory Loss</li><li>• Drowsiness</li><li>• Exhaustion</li><li>• Slurred Speech</li><li>• Glassy Stare</li><li>• Slow, irregular pulse</li><li>• Numbness</li><li>• Decreased level of consciousness</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Remove all <u>wet</u> clothing.</li><li>2. Place resident in dry blankets/clothing.</li><li>3. Move resident to warm environment inside.</li><li>4. If conscious, give resident warm beverage.</li><li>5. Seek medical attention to determine if further treatment is required.</li></ol>
Frostbite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Any discoloration of the skin; flushed, white, yellow or blue depending on the length of exposure</li><li>• Skin appears waxy</li><li>• Lack of feeling or numbness</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Handle the frostbitten area gently.</li><li>2. <b>DO NOT RUB THE AREA.</b></li><li>3. Place the affected area against a warm body part (ex. armpit) or blow warm air onto it.</li></ol>

## **Steps to Prevent Cold Related Illness Hypothermia & Frostbite**

1. Avoid prolonged outdoor exposure on very cold days.
2. Increase your activity level according to the temperature. Avoid activities that cause physical exhaustion.
3. Do not stay outdoors for extended periods of time when it is extremely cold.
4. Dress in layers. Layers of clothing are warmer than one thick layer of clothing.
5. Drink large amounts of non-alcoholic and decaffeinated warm fluids.
6. Replace wet or damp clothes as soon as possible during the winter months.
7. Always wear gloves and a hat when going out into the cold temperatures.
8. If you feel cold or begin to shiver add a layer of clothing or notify a staff person.

## **Steps to be taken by Nursing Homes**

1. Maintain heating systems in good working order in accordance with program regulations.
2. Routinely monitor the temperature in the facility when the outdoor temperature is below 65 degree Fahrenheit (18 degrees Celsius) to assure the inside temperature does not fall below 75 degrees Fahrenheit.
3. If the minimum temperature is not sustained, the emergency plan must be activated.
4. All staff should be familiar with the policies and procedures and know when to implement them.
5. All staff should be familiar with the symptoms of cold-related illness and the initial treatments that should be initiated.
6. Check all doors/windows for drafts. Eliminate drafts when possible by drawing curtains/shades on days when the temperatures are below freezing. Encourage residents to sit away from windows/drafts.
7. Encourage residents to wear appropriate winter clothing while indoors and to dress in layers with appropriate outerwear when leaving the building. Residents should always wear a hat or ear covering and gloves when going outdoors.
8. Offer warm fluids/beverages to residents during the winter months.
9. The whereabouts of all residents must be accounted for to assure that the health and safety of each resident is maintained.