

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**High Blood Pressure**

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is known as “the silent killer.” Nearly 50 million Americans have high blood pressure. Of those, less than 30 percent have it under control. If left untreated, high blood pressure greatly increases your risks for stroke, heart attack, kidney and eye damage.

Your heart pumps blood through a network of arteries, veins and capillaries. The moving blood pushes against the arterial walls, and this force is measured as blood pressure.

(Name and title) of the (county health agency name) said that high blood pressure results from the tightening of very small arteries, called arterioles. “Arterioles regulate the blood flow through your body. As these arterioles tighten, your heart has to work harder to pump blood through smaller space, and the pressure inside the vessels grows,” (he/she) noted.

“Although the real cause of high blood pressure is not known, a number of factors are associated with the condition,” noted (name of official). You are at an increased risk of high blood pressure if you:

- have a family history of high blood pressure;
- are African American;
- are male (women are more at risk after age 55);
- are older than 60;
- face high levels of stress;
- are overweight or obese;
- use tobacco products;
- use oral contraceptives;

- eat a diet high in sodium and saturated fat;
- drink more than one to two alcoholic beverages per day;
- are physically inactive; or
- have diabetes.

“Researchers have also found a gene that appears to be linked to high blood pressure,” said (name of official). “Having the gene does not mean that you or your children will develop high blood pressure, but it does mean that you are more likely to develop it, so your blood pressure should be closely monitored.”

“A visit to your health care provider is the only way to find out if you have high blood pressure,” noted (name of official), “and it’s good practice to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year.”

If your blood pressure is found to be high, the first course of treatment usually involves lifestyle changes such as:

- eating foods low in fat and sodium;
- controlling your weight;
- engaging in regular physical activity;
- learning to better manage stress;
- quitting smoking; and
- avoiding alcohol.

“A healthier lifestyle will benefit all areas of your life, including your blood pressure,” noted (name of official).

For more information on high blood pressure and how it’s treated, please contact the (county health agency) at (phone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Fire Burn Awareness**

Burns are among the most painful and devastating injuries a person can sustain. In the United States, fire burn injuries are the sixth leading cause of unintentional injury death. In New York State in 2006, 175 people died due to this type of injury, and 21,629 more were either hospitalized or treated in an emergency room. But, the good news is that most burns are preventable.

“When most people think about injuries from burns, they think of house fires or incidents involving fireworks,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“We know we should keep children away from matches and no one should play with fireworks. But there are many more measures that can be taken to protect yourself and your loved ones from burns,” (he/she) said.

Everyone should install and maintain smoke alarms on every floor of their home, including the basement, and especially near sleeping areas. Also, develop a family fire escape plan and practice it every six months. Remind every family member that if caught in a smoky room, they should get as close to the floor as possible.

The New York State Department of Health advises you to:

- Test your smoke alarms every month, replace batteries annually and clean the alarms using a vacuum or hair dryer.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in your kitchen. Most house fires start in this room.
- Know your exits and practice escape plans through each of them.

According to the State Health Department, most burn injuries in the home occur in the kitchen. Use caution while using appliances and never leave food unattended on a stove. Also, when young children are present, cook on a back burner and keep all pot handles turned back, away from the stove's edge

“A smart way to keep children safe in the kitchen is to create an area out of the traffic path where children can play while being supervised,” (name of official) advised.

Install anti-scald devices on your faucets, set your water heater temperature at 120 degrees and use child-resistant cigarette lighters. Be cautious when using the following items and keep them away from young children: potpourri pots, scented candles, hot-steam vaporizers (let the water cool before emptying them), home radiators (hire a professional to repair your radiator; do not remove or release the pressure valves), household cleansers or other chemicals (keep in a locked cabinet away from children), lawn products or fresh cement.

For more information about preventing burns, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the State Health Department at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury\\_prevention/children/toolkits/fire/](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury_prevention/children/toolkits/fire/) [health.ny.gov](http://health.ny.gov).

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month**

In recognition of Cervical Cancer Awareness Month this January, (local health agency name) reminds parents that when boys and girls receive the HPV vaccine early - at 11 or 12 years old – they're better protected from the serious health problems human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause, including some cancers and genital warts.

Every year in the United States, HPV causes more than 30,000 cancers in men and women. HPV vaccination can prevent most (about 28,000) of these cancers.

“The HPV vaccine is a simple and safe way to protect preteens, teens and young adults from HPV. The preteen years are the best time to vaccinate. Studies show two doses of vaccine produce a similar or better immune response for younger adolescents compared to young adults who received three shots,” said (agency director).

CDC now recommends that 11 to 12-year-olds receive just two doses of HPV vaccine at least six months apart, rather than the previously recommended three doses. Teens and young adults who start the series later, at ages 15 through 26 years, will continue to need three doses of HPV vaccine to protect against cancer-causing HPV infection.

It is estimated that one in every four Americans is infected with the HPV virus. Most of them are in their late teens and 20s. For most people, HPV will eventually clear up on its own. But for others, the untreated infection could cause genital warts and certain kinds of cancer.

The HPV vaccine can be given at the same time as other recommended preteen vaccines. If your child has started, but not completed the HPV vaccine series, talk with your health care provider about completing the series so he or she will have full protection.

“More than 57 million people have been given the vaccine and there have been no serious safety concerns,” said (name and title) of (local health agency name).

The HPV vaccine is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which is a group of medical and public health experts that develops recommendations on how to use vaccines to prevent diseases.

Private insurance plans in New York State are required to cover the cost of HPV vaccine for patients through the age of 18. The federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program helps pay for children's vaccines for those uninsured or underinsured.

For more information visit <http://www.health.ny.gov/hpv>.

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Child Passenger Safety**

“Whether children travel by car, bicycle, school bus or as a pedestrian, it is everyone’s responsibility to make sure each trip is as safe as possible,” said (name and title) of the (county health agency name).

Nationally, crash deaths among children ages 15 and under decreased by 8.6 percent in 2001, and the use of passenger safety restraints for children continues to increase for all age groups. Still, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for all children ages 6 through 15.

Unrestrained children are three times more likely to be injured than those who are restrained. In 2000, more than half of all children under 15 years old killed in car crashes were unrestrained. Children, should be placed in a child safety seat, booster seat or seat belt every time they ride in a vehicle, (name of official) said. Under New York State law, children under age four must be in a federally-approved child safety seat when traveling in motor vehicles.

When properly installed and used, child safety seats reduce fatal injuries by 71 percent for infants and by 54 percent for toddlers (ages one to four) in passenger cars. Small children (ages two to five) who are placed in seat belts, rather than child safety seats or booster seats, are much more likely to be injured in a crash.

Parents, and childcare providers should follow these child passenger safety recommendations:

- Use rear-facing infant seats from birth to at least one year of age and when the child weighs at least 20 pounds.
- Use forward-facing child safety seats from age one to about age four and when the child weighs 20 to 40 pounds.
- Use forward-facing booster seats from about age four to at least age eight and when the child is less than 4 feet 9 inches tall.
- To use seat belts, a child should be at least eight years old or more than 4 feet 9 inches tall.

Always review the child safety seat’s instruction manual, as some child safety seats will not work well with certain vehicle seats or seat belts. You may have to try several child safety seats to find the one that is most compatible with your vehicle.

Unfortunately, many parents believe that once their child reaches age four and has outgrown his or her forward-facing child safety seat, an adult seat belt offers adequate protection. But, using seat belts to secure small children can be dangerous. A seat belt designed for an adult can cut across a child's neck and the shoulder belt can ride up over the stomach, which could cause a serious or fatal injury in a crash. A booster seat positions the adult seat belt correctly and safely and offers the child greater comfort and visibility.

Never place a child safety seat or a child under age 12 in the front seat of a vehicle equipped with a passenger air bag. The impact of the inflated bag could cause serious or even fatal injuries to a child.

(Name of official) offered the following tips to keep your child safe while he or she is traveling to and from school:

- When waiting for the school bus, your child should wait at the bus stop, and stand back five giant steps from the curb.
- Tell your child to avoid returning to the bus for any items left behind.
- Make sure your child never bends down near the bus.
- If your child must cross the street in front of the bus, he/she should make contact with the driver and wait for the signal that it is safe to cross in front of the bus. Your child should always look both ways before crossing the street.
- Behind the bus is the "danger zone". Tell your child to never go behind the bus where the driver can't see.

It is also important that children follow these "rules of the road" when they are bicycling:

- Wear a properly fitted, approved bicycle helmet at all times.
- Stay off busy streets.
- Come to a complete stop at intersections, and check for traffic at all corners.
- Always ride with the flow of traffic, and follow all traffic signs and signals.
- Don't do stunts or ride double.
- Make sure the bicycle is in good working order and has reflectors and a light for riding at night.

By following the above guidelines, parents and caregivers can ensure the safety of their children.

For more information on child passenger safety, call the (county health agency name) at (phone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Childhood Obesity**

In the era of fast food, TV and computer games, it is clear that parents must be as concerned with poor nutrition and lack of physical activity as they are with other health risks to their children. Today, more children in New York State are overweight, and they tend to be more overweight than in the past. Young people consume too many calories and engage in too little physical activity, resulting in an overweight generation that will face increased health risks as adults.

“Overweight children are at greater risk of diabetes and other serious health problems. Children who are not encouraged to be physically active and make healthy nutritional choices, grow up to become adults who are more likely to have heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other life-threatening diseases,” said (name of official) of the (local health agency name).

“Besides health problems, overweight and obesity can lead to poor self-image, insecurity and learning problems in schools,” (he/she) said.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers MyPyramid for Kids as a fun approach to addressing the very serious problem of childhood obesity. You can find MyPyramid for Kids at [www.foodpyramid.com/mypyramid](http://www.foodpyramid.com/mypyramid). MyPyramid for Kids provides age-appropriate information about the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the MyPyramid Food Guidance System of the USDA.

MyPyramid for Kids reminds children to be physically active every day, or most days, and to make healthy food choices. Every part of the pyramid has a message for children. They represent the recommended proportion of food from each of six food groups of grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk, and meat and beans.

Daily physical activity is prominent. Through an interactive game, lesson plans, colorful posters and flyers, worksheets and tips for families, MyPyramid for Kids encourages children, teachers and parents to work together to make healthier food choices and be active every day.

The MyPyramid for Kids slogan for children is “Eat Right, Exercise, Have Fun”. Parents and guardians can help young people adopt healthy lifestyles by encouraging them to follow the MyPyramid for Kids key messages. The (local health agency name) recommends the following tips to parents and guardians:

- Be good role models for physical activity and healthful food choices.
- Replace sugary, high-calorie snacks with fat-free yogurt, real fruit juice or tasty fruit and vegetable sticks.
- Serve fat-free or one-percent milk, instead of whole milk.
- Set limits on the amount of time your children spend watching television and playing video games.

## NEWS RELEASE

### Preventing Falls in Older Adults

Falls can affect older adults in many ways. If an older person falls and is injured, his or her ability to live independently decreases. Even a fall that does not cause an injury can limit confidence and the ability to feel comfortable living independently.

“In New York State, fall-related injuries are highest among persons aged 70 and older,” said (name and title) of the (county health agency name). “Hip fractures and fall-related deaths are also most common in this age group.”

Older people are more likely to have health problems and to be taking multiple medications that can impair balance, reaction time, strength or vision. “The rise in falls and costly fall-related injuries can be attributed to a number of factors. However, many of them are preventable,” (name of official) noted.

A lack of knowledge about risk factors and how to prevent them contributes to many falls. “Some people think that falls are a normal part of aging and are not preventable,” said (name of official).

The following are five key risk factors of falls among older adults:

- **Osteoporosis:** Osteoporosis is a condition where bones become less porous, less resistant to stress and more prone to fractures. Caused by hormonal changes, calcium and vitamin D deficiency, and decreased physical activity, it is a chief cause of fractures in older adults, especially women.
- **Lack of physical activity:** A lack of regular physical activity results in poor muscle tone, decreased strength and loss of flexibility.
- **Impaired vision:** Age-related vision diseases such as cataracts and glaucoma can alter people’s perception, visual acuity, peripheral vision and susceptibility to glare.
- **Medications:** Some medications can reduce mental alertness, affecting balance and gait, and causing drops in blood pressure while standing.
- **Environmental hazards.** At least one-third of all falls in older adults involve environmental hazards in the home. The most common hazard is tripping over objects on the floor. Other hazards include poor lighting, loose rugs, lack of grab bars or poorly mounted ones and unsteady furniture.

While all of these factors increase the chance of falls, most of them are preventable. Some simple things you can do to decrease the risk of falls in and around your home are:

- Make sure all rooms are brightly lit, and place night lights in each room.
- Reduce the clutter. Prevent people from tripping over objects by putting them away after each use.
- Get rid of all cords. Arrange your furniture so that all electrical and extension cords are out of the way.
- Get an eye exam each year, and wear glasses as prescribed by your health care provider.
- Get regular physical activity. Engaging in 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can increase muscle strength and flexibility and improve balance.
- Install sturdy handrails in bathrooms and by all steps – and use them.
- Secure all rugs. Be sure all throw rugs and scatter rugs have non-skid backing.
- Wear shoes that have flat or low-heeled soles, whenever possible.
- Watch out for pets. Be aware of where your pet is, and be careful when visiting others who have pets, as well.
- Avoid uneven walking surfaces. Be sure to avoid broken sidewalks and areas under construction, when possible.

Mother Nature presents her own hazards when it comes to falls. “Snow is the greatest culprit,” warned (name of official). “Try to limit your driving to daylight hours, and always park where it is clear of snow and ice. It’s also a good idea to let someone know where you are or, better yet, take a friend with you when you travel,” (he/she) added.

For more information on how to prevent falls in older adults, visit the New York State Department of Health at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury\\_prevention/falls.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury_prevention/falls.htm).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Family Disaster Planning**

When disaster strikes, you won't have time to plan your response. Planning in advance for an emergency is the best way to protect your family. "By working as a team and ensuring that family members know their roles, your family will be prepared to handle disaster before it strikes," said (name and title) of (the county health agency name).

(He/she) said, "A well thought-out preparedness plan will better protect your family from such disasters as a tornado, hurricane, earthquake, fire, flood, a hazardous materials spill or even an act of bioterrorism. Your plan should include educating your family about what actions to take to keep them safe, as well as assembling a family disaster supply kit."

According to the American Red Cross, your family disaster plan should include educating your family about warning signals, emergency numbers, contact person(s) and a meeting place. (Name of official) said, "Talk to your partner and children about warning signals. Your family should be familiar with emergency sounds and warnings, such as fire detectors, fire alarms and sirens. Everyone should know emergency numbers. Keep emergency numbers visible and accurate in your home. All phones should have easy-to-read emergency numbers posted on them. Have family members carry emergency numbers in their wallets, backpacks and other carry-along items."

(He/she) continued, "Designate an out-of-state contact person for a buddy check. If you are separated during an emergency, family members can check-in with that "buddy." Assign two places to meet in case your family gets separated or if you are not allowed to return to your home."

The American Red Cross says that you should stock your emergency kit with six basic supplies: water, food, first aid and supplies, clothing, bedding, tools and special items, such as communication devices. Since electricity, power and phone lines could be knocked out, it's crucial that your supplies

include a battery-operated or ham radio. Also, include battery-operated flashlights. Store the supplies in an easy-to-carry, waterproof backpack or duffel bag.

(Name of official) said, “Keep at least a three-day supply of water for each person in your household. Store water in plastic containers, such as soft drink bottles. Store one gallon of water per person per day- two quarts for drinking and two quarts for food preparation and sanitation.”

“Store at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food,” (he/she) continued. Good choices are canned meats, fruits and soups; high-energy foods, such as peanut butter and granola bars; and comfort and stress foods, such as cookies and dry cereal, stored in a tightly sealed container.

The first aid kit should include assorted, sterile adhesive bandages, scissors, needles, tweezers, moistened toiles, antiseptic, thermometer, lubricant, cleansing agent or soap and sunscreen. Also, include non-prescription drugs such as aspirin and non-aspirin pain reliever, anti-diarrhea medication, antacid, syrup of Ipecac (used to induce vomiting for poisoning and given under the direction of a poison prevention specialist) and laxatives.

(Name of official) said, “Evaluate your family disaster plan at least once a year. Make sure batteries, medications and emergency numbers are updated regularly.”

For more information on creating a disaster plan and kit, call the (county health agency name) at (phone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**January is Glaucoma Awareness Month**

Glaucoma, the leading cause of blindness, is an eye disease that affects more than two million Americans over the age of 40, according to the federal National Institutes of Health.

“At least half of the people who have glaucoma don’t know it because glaucoma usually has no symptoms until the disease has developed to a later stage. That’s why it is important to be tested for glaucoma. At this time there is no cure for glaucoma, but treatment is available to reduce the severity of glaucoma,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“January is Glaucoma Awareness Month when we are reminded of the importance of regular eye examinations to detect the potentially blinding disease of glaucoma and begin treatment in its early stages,” (he/she) said.

Glaucoma can strike anyone. While certain risk factors, such as family history, can increase your chances of developing the disease, glaucoma occurs mainly in adults over the age of 50. Those who are African-American, have diabetes or high blood pressure, are very nearsighted, have had damage to the eye, or have used steroids for a long time are also at increased risk. Young adults can get glaucoma too. African-Americans are also more susceptible at a younger age.

Glaucoma leads to blindness by damaging the eye’s optic nerve. The optic nerve is the part of the eye which carries visual information to the brain. It is made up of more than one million nerve cells.

When pressure builds up in the eye, the nerve cells become compressed, causing them to be damaged and eventually die. The death of these cells results in permanent vision loss. Early diagnosis and treatment of glaucoma can help prevent this from happening.

If glaucoma remains untreated, people may lose vision out of the side and corner of their eyes. Over time, straight-ahead vision may decrease until there is a total loss of vision. Vision loss is irreversible.

The best way to protect your sight is to get tested and, if necessary, begin treatment early. This exam includes a tonometry test to measure the pressure in your eyes, an examination of the inside of your eyes and optic nerves, and a visual field test to check for changes in central and side vision.

If you have glaucoma, treatment can begin immediately with prescription eye drops, medications and monitoring. In some cases, laser treatment or surgery may be effective.

For more information, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the Glaucoma Foundation at [www.glaucomafoundation.org](http://www.glaucomafoundation.org).



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**March is Nutrition Month**

One of the most simple and basic rules of good health is balancing energy expended with energy consumed resulting in maintenance of a healthy weight. Good nutrition, combined with physical activity, is the key to maintaining that balance.

March is Nutrition Month, which recognizes the role of nutrition in maintaining a healthy weight, preventing disease, and improving overall health. During Nutrition Month, we should remember to eat whole grains, vegetables, fruits and low-fat or fat-free dairy products.

Excess calories and too much fat and sugar are the primary nutritional problems challenging Americans today. Poor nutrition, combined with sedentary lifestyles, leads to obesity, the second most preventable cause of death in the United States.

In New York State, 58 percent of adults were considered overweight or obese in a New York State Department of Health survey conducted in cooperation with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2004. According to CDC surveys, the obesity rate among New York adults doubled between 1990 and 2002.

A person is overweight if his or her body mass index (BMI) is between 25 and 29.9, and considered obese if the BMI is 30 or more. To calculate BMI, divide weight in pounds by the square of a person's height in inches and multiply by 704.5.

A 2005 CDC survey of New York State youth found that 28 percent of high school students were overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. The 2005 Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System found that 32 percent of New York's low-income children between two- and five-years-old were overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

“Choosing healthy nutrition, helps to reduce the risk of disease. Good nutrition can decrease the risks of heart disease, osteoporosis, some cancers and high blood pressure,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“Choosing vegetables and fruit helps to reduce the fat and cholesterol in your diet, while providing an excellent source of vitamins, fiber and energy,” (he/she) said.

The State Health Department recommends five to nine servings of vegetables and fruit and three or more servings of low-fat milk or other low-fat dairy product or calcium rich foods every day. The State Health Department, through its Eat Well, Play Hard intervention, asks parents, teachers and others to serve as role models to encourage children to adopt healthy lifestyles that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Eat Well, Play Hard also promotes at least 60 minutes of physical activity, including both free and structured play, for children over the age of two and at least 30 minutes for adults every day.

It is easy to incorporate tasty, healthful foods in your daily eating plan. For example, start the day with a glass of orange juice and add raisins to your cereal. Have a salad with lunch, and snack on dried fruit in the afternoon. Add extra vegetables to whatever you are cooking for dinner, whether it is soup, stew or stir-fry. In the grocery store, buy one percent milk instead of whole milk.

For more information about healthful nutrition, visit the State Health Department web site at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition).



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Healthy Nutrition for Older Adults**

As people get older, they tend to experience less pleasure from food, so they have less desire to eat. That's among the reasons why older adults often skip meals or snack on fast foods. This results in poor nutrition, which can seriously threaten their health.

In recognition of Nutrition Month in March, the (county health agency name) advises older adults and those who care for them that healthy nutrition remains important throughout their lives.

“When you choose healthy nutrition, you help to reduce the risk of disease and help to control the symptoms and reduce the severity of health problems. Good nutrition can decrease the risks of heart disease, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, some cancers, gastrointestinal problems, obesity and underweight,” said (name and title) of the (county health agency name).

“Poor nutrition increases the risk and severity of illness, and makes it more difficult to recover,” (he/she) said.

“A lack of physical strength or depression made worse by poor health are among the reasons older adults need assisted living care. Healthy nutrition helps to maintain strength, independence and better mental health,” (he/she) said.

There are many reasons why older adults may fail to get the nutrients they need to protect themselves and maintain a good quality of life. In many cases, people have physical problems, such as loss of teeth or stomach ailments, which discourages them from eating. For them, vegetables and fruits may be easier to consume when canned or prepared as juice, purees or stews.

Older adults may have financial difficulties, or they may be living alone and feel socially isolated and, as a result, lose interest in cooking and mealtime.

“Older people may skip meals, lose weight and become undernourished. Or, they may snack on unhealthy foods, frequently eat at fast food outlets, and choose frozen dinners, lunch meats and other highly processed foods. The result is that they may consume too many empty calories, fat and sodium without getting a healthy balance of vitamins and minerals,” (name of official) said.

New York State provides funding for nutrition programs to help older adults maintain their health. Meals are served to those aged 60 and over in their homes and at many senior centers, schools and other public buildings throughout the state.

By law, each meal must comply with the federal *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and provide at least one-third of the recommended dietary allowances for an older adult. These meals also provide opportunities to socialize, which encourages good mental health.

Other nutrition services include nutrition education, screening, counseling and physical activity programs. For those who qualify, food stamps are available to help purchase healthy foods.

Family members and friends can help older adults by talking to them about nutrition programs and helping them complete the necessary forms.

For more information about nutrition for older adults, call the (county health agency name) at (phone number).



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Childhood Obesity**

Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past three decades. For example, among elementary school age children, 21 percent in upstate New York and 24 percent in New York City are obese.

Every parent should be concerned about the increasing risk of obesity in children and youth. Obesity or overweight at a young age can lead to lifelong health problems, including heart disease, diabetes and asthma. The rise in overweight children has led to an increase in type 2 diabetes, formerly known as “adult onset diabetes”, in children and youths. In addition, overweight children and teens are more likely to become obese as adults.

Besides health problems, overweight and obesity can lead to poor self-image, insecurity and learning problems in school.

“The epidemic of childhood obesity is a serious health problem, but fortunately we know the leading causes. They are sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition. Parents have a role helping their children balance the calories they consume with the calories they use through physical activity and normal growth,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

The New York State Department of Health recommends increasing daily consumption of vegetables and fruit, and three or more servings of low-fat milk or other low-fat dairy products or calcium-rich foods every day. Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

“It’s important for parents to be good role models and to buy healthful food for their children. Crispy vegetables, tasty fruits, and low-fat or fat-free yogurt can make healthful snack alternatives to candy and chips. The next time you reach for milk on the store shelf, choose low-fat or fat-free instead of whole milk,” (name of official) said.

Parents should focus on good health, not on a certain weight goal. Teach and model healthy and positive attitudes toward food and physical activity without emphasizing body weight.

The (local health agency name) also recommends limiting the time your children watch television, play video games or surf the web to no more than two hours per day. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against television viewing for children age two or younger.

Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that involve more activity. Be a good role model by taking a brisk walk in the park with your children or leaving the car in the driveway and walking to the next family activity.

Other ways to encourage healthy lifestyles are:

- Remove sugar-sweetened drinks from your home.
- Offer more whole-grain foods with meals and snacks.
- Reduce the number of meals eaten out at fast-food and other restaurants.
- Sit down together for family meals and have that meal last at least 30 minutes.
- Remove TVs and computers from children's bedrooms.
- Include children in active chores, such as washing the car or walking the dog.

To learn more about childhood obesity and how parents can help encourage physical activity and healthful nutrition, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/obesity](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/obesity).



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Winter Pedestrian Safety**

When conditions are right, wintertime walks can be exhilarating. However, snowy sidewalks and icy streets can turn a safe stroll into a dangerous activity. Many injuries result from falls on slippery surfaces, warns (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

During and after a snowstorm, residents should keep their steps and walkways as free of snow as possible to keep them from becoming ice-covered. If sidewalks become dangerous, or if there are no sidewalks, pedestrians may be forced to walk in the street.

Walking in the street may present its own hazards. Road surfaces may make it hard for motorists to stop at traffic signals or to slow down. Drivers may also be distracted by snow-covered signs and landmarks. When this happens, pedestrians are at risk of getting hit by a motor vehicle.

“Older adults should be especially careful while walking outside in the winter. An older person’s risk for falls increases if he or she has dementia, impaired vision or impaired hearing,” (he/she) said.

Falls are more likely for people who have limited flexibility and coordination, as well as adverse reactions to some medicines. Falls are a leading cause of traumatic brain injuries, and among older adults falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.

This winter, follow these safe walking tips:

- Wear shoes or boots with non-slip soles. Also, wear reflective or bright-colored clothing, such as a hat or scarf, so motorists are better able to see you.
- Follow all traffic signs and signals.
- If you have to walk in the street, face traffic and stay as close to the curb as possible.

- Before you step off the curb, make sure any oncoming vehicles have come to a complete stop.
- Be aware of your surroundings. A covered patch of ice or a pothole filled with snow may cause a slip or fall.
- Bend your knees a little and take slower steps to limit your chances of falling. Wear gloves to avoid putting your hands in your pockets. Avoid carrying heavy packages which may affect your balance and block your view.
- If you are pushing a child in a stroller in the road, put the stroller in front of you and as close to the curb as possible. Dress children in reflective or bright-colored clothes.
- Hats or scarves that cover your ears can also distort or eliminate the muffled sounds of approaching vehicles. Keep warm, but make sure that you can hear what's going on around you.

For more information about pedestrian safety, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury\\_prevention](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury_prevention).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**January is Radon Action Month**

According to a national survey, most people don't realize that radon exposure is the second leading cause of lung cancer deaths in the United States and the number one cause among nonsmokers. Increasing public awareness is the focus of Radon Action Month in January and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) national public service campaign.

During Radon Action Month, communities will hold activities to educate about radon risks and encourage testing. The EPA's campaign features TV commercials, radio ads, billboards and print materials with a warning from the Surgeon General that radon causes lung cancer.

"Radon threatens the health of many New Yorkers," said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). "Although radon is at elevated levels in numerous homes, its health effects are often ignored because it is invisible."

Radon is a colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that seeps into your home from underground, usually from the surrounding soil. The gas enters through the lower levels of homes but can be found anywhere in a building. It attaches itself to a person's lungs where it can begin the process of causing lung cancer.

"Everyone should know their risk and have their home tested," (name of official) said. "Testing your home is especially important if you live in a high-risk area or if you are planning to build or buy a home."

The only way to tell if your home has dangerous levels of radon is to test for it. Once detected, homes with high levels of radon can easily be made safe. To find out if

you live in a high-risk area, view “Radon Maps” in the radon section of the New York State Department of Health web site at <http://nyradon.org> or call the Radon Hotline at 1-800-458-1158.

The (local health agency name) also can tell you how to obtain a radon test kit. Testing is as simple as leaving the kit in a specific area for a set number of days and returning it to a testing facility. Results are generally available within one to two weeks.

For more information about radon, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Preventing Respiratory Illness**

Every year, millions of Americans suffer through the winter months with the runny nose, sore throat, fever and body aches of the common cold -- or is it the flu? What if it has progressed to pneumonia? Understanding the differences among these three common illnesses is the first step in treating them appropriately and minimizing or avoiding colds, flu and pneumonia.

According to (name and title) of the (county health agency name), viruses that cause colds are many -- at least 200 -- but there is only one group of viruses, the influenza viruses, that cause flu. Colds are generally not very serious. They last from three to seven days and include coughing, a runny nose, sneezing, body aches and possibly a fever.

(Name of official) says the best treatment for the common cold is to follow your grandmother's advice. "Get plenty of rest, drink hot liquids and soup, gargle with warm salt water and take an over-the-counter cold remedy, such as a decongestant or nasal spray," (he/she) said.

Like the common cold, influenza is an upper respiratory illness. Flu symptoms include fever (which is often high), cough or sore throat, muscle aches, headache and fatigue. Flu often lasts longer than a cold -- up to two weeks -- and requires a different treatment.

"There are four different antiviral medications, available by prescription, that are effective against the flu virus," (name of official) said.

Flu antivirals are effective only if started within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms. Antivirals can shorten the course of the illness by two or three days and lessen the severity of symptoms.

People who should strongly consider having their flu treated with antivirals include those who are at higher risk of developing serious complications from the flu, such as pneumonia. Higher-risk people include those with diabetes, asthma, chronic bronchitis or other chronic illnesses, the elderly, and those with immune deficiencies.

Distinguishing between a common cold and the flu is not always easy. "Someone with a severe cold could actually be more sick than someone with a mild case of the flu, so it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart. What we generally use to tell them apart is whether or not there is a local flu outbreak at the time," (name of official) said.

"Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual flu vaccination for children ages 6 to 23 months, people age 50 and older, high-risk people and people who can transmit influenza to those at high risk," (he/she) advised.

"If your typical cold or flu symptoms begin to improve within three to five days, you do not have to worry about pneumonia. However, if you are not getting better, if you have been improving and symptoms suddenly worsen, if you have a cough that gets worse, if you feel out of breath, or if you develop a fever, you should call your health care provider. These are indications you may be developing pneumonia," (name of official) said.

As the respiratory illness season approaches, you should ask your health care provider if the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects against a common type of pneumonia, is recommended for you.

For more information on the prevention of the common cold, flu and pneumonia, call the (county health agency name) at (telephone number). For more information on treatment of any illness, contact your health care provider.

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Secondhand Smoke**

The Surgeon General has stated for years that there is no such thing as risk-free exposure to secondhand smoke. Even people who do not smoke can be harmed by smoke from those who do. And yet, almost half of all nonsmoking New Yorkers are still regularly exposed to secondhand smoke.

Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their risks of life-threatening disease. The risk of heart disease among nonsmokers who breathe secondhand smoke goes up by 25 to 30 percent and lung cancer by 20 to 30 percent.

Secondhand smoke is known to be associated with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), respiratory problems, ear infections, and asthma attacks in infants and children.

“Recent studies find that even brief secondhand smoke exposure can cause immediate harm,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). “The only way to protect nonsmokers from the dangerous chemicals in secondhand smoke is to eliminate smoking indoors,” (he/she) advised.

“The health effects of secondhand smoke exposure are more far reaching than was previously thought,” (he/she) said.

Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 substances, including more than 50 cancer-causing chemicals. Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke inhale the same toxins as smokers.

“The scientific evidence is now indisputable: secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance. It is a serious health hazard that can lead to disease in children and nonsmoking adults,” (name of official) said.

“Even brief exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and increases risk for heart disease and lung cancer. Since the bodies of infants and children are still developing, they are especially vulnerable to the poisons in secondhand smoke,” (name of official) said.

The good news is that, unlike some public health hazards, secondhand smoke exposure is easily prevented.

“Assuring smoke-free indoor environments is a proven, simple approach that prevents exposure and harm,” (name of official) said. “Even the most sophisticated ventilation system cannot completely eliminate secondhand smoke exposure. Only a smoke-free environment affords full protection,” (he/she) said.

Progress over the past 20 years in clearing the air of tobacco smoke is a major public health success story.

“Many thousands of cases of disease and early death have been averted and millions of dollars in health care costs saved. Sustained efforts, however, are crucial to protect New Yorkers who continue to be regularly exposed to secondhand smoke in the home, at work, and in enclosed public spaces,” (name of official) said.

To learn more about the dangers of secondhand smoke and what can be done to prevent the effects it has on people, visit the New York State Department of Health at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco\\_control](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/tobacco_control).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Snow Shoveling and Snow Blowing Safety**

Many of us enjoy watching the first fluffy snowflakes of the winter season fall outside our windows. At the same time, we imagine piles of snow to be cleared from our driveway, steps and sidewalk in the coming months. By following some simple safety precautions, these inevitable cold weather tasks can be accomplished safely and without injuries.

The good news is that 15 minutes of snow shoveling counts as moderate physical activity. The bad news is that the number of fatal heart attacks resulting from snow shoveling increases after a heavy snowfall. Snow shoveling is extremely hard work. It increases heart rate and blood pressure. Cold weather itself, without any physical exertion, puts additional strain on your heart. Do not shovel snow unless you are in good physical condition. People who are overweight, have heart problems, high cholesterol or high blood pressure are at higher risk for injuries when snow shoveling. If you are not physically active, it's a good idea to consult a healthcare provider before shoveling snow.

“Back injuries are among the most common injuries resulting from snow shoveling. Stretching first is always a good idea. If possible, wait until later in the day to start shoveling.” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). Many back injuries occur in the morning because the tissue around the spine is not as warmed up or loose after a night of rest. Ironically, people between the ages of 20 and 50 are generally more likely than older individuals to injure their backs because they may not be aware they are out of condition. Older people with back problems should never attempt to shovel snow. An older person also has a greater risk of slipping on ice or snow and breaking a wrist, hip, arm or leg.

Here are some shoveling tips to prevent back injury and strain:

- Use a lightweight snow shovel. New “back-saver” snow shovels are designed with crooked handles to minimize bending and back strain.
- Stand with your feet hip-width apart for balance and keep the shovel close to your body.
- Take small loads of snow, bend at the knees and lift with your leg muscles, not your back.
- Scoop in a forward motion and step in the direction you throw the snow.
- Avoid twisting movements which put additional strain on your back.
- Listen to your body and stop if you feel pain.
- Take frequent breaks. Stand up and walk around for at least two or three minutes after every 10 minutes of snow shoveling.

Another leading cause of injury during the winter season is failure to take precautions while using a snow blower,” (name of official) said. These simple steps will help you avoid injury while using a snow blower:

- Wear winter boots with treads and tie the laces tightly so you have a firm footing before you start the snow blower.
- Remove obstacles from your path and aim the snow carefully. If rocks or chunks of ice are thrown by the snow blower, they may cause injury or damage to property.
- Do not unclog the snow blower chute while the engine is running.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothing that may get caught in the snow blower.
- Do not operate the blower over gravel or loose stones or on steep hills.
- Know how to shut the machine off quickly.
- Never leave your snow blower running and unattended.
- Keep children away from the snow blower at all times.

Remember, as with any outdoor activity, you should dress properly for the weather.

Wear several layers of loose fitting, lightweight clothing. Half of body heat is lost through the head, so wear a hat. Wear mittens instead of gloves. Entrapped, insulated air, warmed by body heat, is the best protection against the cold.

For more information on shoveling and snow blowing safety, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).



**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Snow Shoveling & Snow Blowing Safety**

As winter approaches, our images of the first snowfall remind us of outdoor tasks, such as snow shoveling and snow blowing. “By following some simple safety precautions, cold weather tasks can be accomplished safely and without injuries,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

Most importantly, older people and people with back problems should never attempt to shovel snow. An older person has a greater risk of slipping on ice or snow and causing injury.

“It’s important to stretch and warm up your muscles before you begin shoveling. Many back injuries occur in the morning, because the tissue around the spine is tight after a night of rest. Ironically, people between the ages of 20 and 50 are more likely than older individuals to injure their backs, because they may not be aware that they are out of condition,” (name of official) cautioned.

The (local health agency name) suggests the following shoveling tips to prevent back injury and strain:

- Use a proper snow shovel.
- Take small loads of snow, bend at the knees and lift with your leg muscles, not your back.
- Scoop in a forward motion, and step in the direction you throw the snow.
- Avoid twisting which puts additional strain on your back.
- Take frequent breaks. Stand up and walk around after every 10 minutes of snow shoveling.

“Snow shoveling is extremely hard work. Do not shovel snow unless you are in good physical condition,” (name of official) said.

“Cold weather, without any physical exertion, puts additional strain on your heart. People who are overweight, have heart problems or have high blood pressure are at high risk for injuries when snow shoveling,” (he/she) warned.

Failing to take proper precautions while using a snow blower is another leading cause of injury during the winter season.

The (local health agency name) suggests the following steps to help you avoid injury while using a snow blower:

- Read the owner’s manual thoroughly before operating the snow blower.
- Keep both feet firmly on the ground while starting the snow blower.
- Remove obstacles from your path, and aim the snow carefully. If rocks or chunks of ice are thrown by the snow blower, they may cause injuries or damage property.
- Do not unclog the snow blower chute while the engine is running.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothing, such as a scarf, that may get caught in the snow blower.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages while operating the snow blower.
- Do not operate the blower over gravel, loose stones or on steep hills to avoid losing control and causing injuries.
- Know how to shut the machine off quickly.
- Never leave your snow blower running while unattended.

Remember, as with any outdoor activity, you will be more comfortable and safer if you dress properly for the weather. Wear several layers of light-weight clothing, and cover your head. Fifty percent of body heat is lost through the head. For more information on shoveling and snow blowing safety, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Stroke Awareness**

Each year, 750,000 Americans suffer strokes. Stroke is the third leading cause of death in this country. But, strokes can be prevented. Early attention to risk factors, regular checkups, and a healthy eating plan and physical activity are important prevention strategies.

A stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel or artery, interrupting blood flow to the brain; or when a blood vessel to the brain bursts. When a stroke occurs, it kills brain cells in the immediate area. When brain cells die, control of abilities such as speech, vision, movement and memory can be affected, depending on the severity of the stroke.

“It’s important to know the risk factors of stroke,” said (name and title) of the (county health agency name). You are at greater risk of having a stroke if you:

- are 55 or older;
- have a family history of stroke;
- have earlier experienced a stroke;
- have high blood pressure;
- smoke;
- have diabetes; or
- have heart or vascular disease.

“Detection and management of stroke risk factors are the best ways to decrease your personal risk of stroke,” said (name of official). “Visit a doctor to discuss your risk and develop a treatment plan, “ (he/she) advised.

If you experience the warning signs of stroke or recognize them in someone else, call 9-1-1 immediately. Warning signs include:

- sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body;
- sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding;
- sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes;
- sudden difficulty walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; or
- sudden severe headache with no known cause.

“A stroke is an emergency. Receiving treatment within three hours can greatly reduce the risk of permanent damage,” said (name of official).

For more information about stroke, its warning signs, prevention and treatment, call the (county health agency name) at (phone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Toy Safety**

As we prepare for another holiday season, children everywhere have one thought on their minds: toys! However, those buying the toys need to consider the safety measures that should be used to enjoy those toys safely.

(Name and title) of the (local health agency name) urges parents and other gift-givers to read the warning labels of any toys they might buy, and also to check that they are buying toys suitable for their child's age.

"More than 150,000 children under the age of 15 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries in 2005. Almost half of these were the result of a small child choking on a ball or other small toy part," (name of official) said.

By following a few simple tips we can greatly reduce the number of these injuries and deaths.

You should buy toys that match the age range, skill sets, and interests of the child. Most toys have a "recommended age" sticker, which should be taken as a starting point in the selection process. Until your child turns three, toy parts should be bigger than his/her mouth to avoid the possibility of choking.

To determine whether a toy poses a choking risk, try fitting it through a toilet paper roll. If a toy or part of toy can fit inside the cylinder, it's not safe. If you have a young child, eight years old or younger, it is best not to give toys with any sharp edges or points. Keep toys with magnets away from children under six years old. If swallowed, magnets may cause serious internal injuries.

There are also a few guidelines to remember after children have opened their gifts. You should immediately dispose of plastic wrappings on toys to keep them out of

reach of small children. If you buy a toy for an older child, make sure it is kept out of reach of a younger sibling or neighbor's child.

Follow instructions and warnings on battery chargers. Some of these can come without a device that prevents overcharging. If you buy a bike, scooter, in-line skates or skateboard, make sure your child has all of the necessary protective gear, which includes approved helmets, and elbow pads and/or kneepads for scooters, skates and skateboards.

When looking for toys that are safe for your children, there are several categories of toys you should avoid. Toys that make loud noises, such as toy guns, can potentially impair a child's hearing. Projectiles, such as propelled toy darts, may cause serious eye injuries. Electrical toys can cause burns and should be completely avoided if your child is less than eight years old.

Toys are often recalled for various reasons, including unsafe lead levels, choking or fire hazards, or other problems that make them dangerous. Toys that are recalled should be removed right away. If you think your child has been exposed to a toy containing lead, contact your child's doctor about testing for blood lead levels.

To learn more about toy safety or if a toy has been recalled, visit the New York State Consumer Protection Board at [www.consumer.state.ny.us](http://www.consumer.state.ny.us).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Winter Weather Emergencies**

It's that time of year. As the wind howls and the snow falls, the possibility of power outages looms. Are you prepared with a well-stocked food supply? Tailor your supply of food to the type of things your family normally eats. Familiar foods can lift morale and give a feeling of security, even in the height of a storm.

“Build up your reserves by buying a few extra items each week until you have a supply large enough to feed your family for three to seven days,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). Consider whether there is anyone in your household with special diets or allergies that you need to accommodate. Buy foods that require no refrigeration and little or no preparation or cooking.

If the power goes out, open the refrigerator and freezer as little as possible. Eat the most perishable items first, such as leftovers, meat, poultry and food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.

“For emergency cooking, you can use a fireplace, wood stove, barbeque grill, or camp stove,” (name of official) said. Never use a barbeque inside the house. You can also heat food with candle warmers, chafing dishes and fondue pots, but be careful about fire safety. Canned food can be eaten right out of the can. Make sure you have a manual can opener available in your emergency supplies. If you heat the can, be sure to open it and remove the label first.

Despite your best efforts, the food in your freezer may thaw before power is restored. Foods that have completely thawed, but are still cold may be eaten or refrozen if the following conditions are met: fruits may be eaten or refrozen if they still taste and

smell good. Vegetables should not be eaten or refrozen if thawed completely, since bacteria can multiply rapidly in them. Meat and poultry should be thrown away if color or odor is questionable, or if it has been warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours. Fish and shellfish should not be eaten or refrozen if thawed completely.

Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out! Make sure to check your expiration dates on canned foods every six months. For more information on food safety during a weather emergency, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Winter Pedestrian Safety**

Walking outside in the winter may be refreshing. However, snowy sidewalks and icy streets can make walking a challenge and a hazard if you don't take basic precautions, warns (name and title) of the (county health agency name).

During and after a snowstorm, residents should keep their sidewalks clear of snow to keep them from turning to ice. If sidewalks become dangerous, or if there are no sidewalks, pedestrians may need to walk in the street. However, (name of official) said, walking in the street may present its own hazards. Road surfaces may make it impossible for motorists to stop at traffic signals or to slow down for pedestrians. Snow-covered signs and landmarks may also distract drivers. When this happens, pedestrians are at risk of getting hit by a car or becoming injured from a fall.

Every day in New York State, 11 pedestrians are hospitalized for serious injuries and one pedestrian is killed in a traffic-related incident, said (name of official). Almost one-third of these injuries result in traumatic brain injury, requiring costly medical bills and lifelong rehabilitation.

“Older adults should be especially careful while walking outside in the winter,” (he/she) said. “An older person's risk for falls increases if he or she has dementia, impaired vision or impaired hearing.”

Limited flexibility and coordination, as well as adverse reactions to some medications, can also make falls more likely. Falls are a leading cause of traumatic brain injuries and, among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.

To protect yourself from injuries this winter, practice these safe winter walking tips at all times:

- Wear shoes or boots with non-slip soles. Also, wear reflective or bright-colored clothing, such as a hat or scarf, so motorists are better able to see you.
- Follow all traffic signs and signals.
- If you have to walk in the street, walk **facing** traffic and as close to the curb as possible.
- Before you step off the curb, make sure any oncoming vehicles have come to a complete stop.
- Be aware of your surroundings. A covered patch of ice or a pothole filled with snow may cause an unexpected slip or fall.
- Bend your knees a little and take slower steps to greatly reduce your chances of falling. Wear gloves to avoid putting your hands in your pockets. Avoid carrying heavy packages which may affect your balance and block your view.
- If you are pushing a child in a stroller in the road, put the stroller in front of you and as close to the curb as possible. Dress children in reflective or bright-colored clothes.
- Hats or scarves that cover your ears can also distort or eliminate the muffled sounds of approaching vehicles. Keep warm, but make sure that you can hear what's going on around you.

For more information about pedestrian safety, call the (county health agency name) at (phone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury\\_prevention/pedestrians.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury_prevention/pedestrians.htm).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Winter Skin Care**

New York winters can take a toll on your skin. Our state's long periods of cold weather and low humidity produce itchy, dry skin for many of us.

“When you turn up your home's furnace, moisture is taken out of the air and out of your skin,” said (name and title) of the (county health agency name).

“Spending time outdoors in the wind and sun also dries out your skin. Exposed areas may become chapped and raw or sunburned,” (he/she) said.

To relieve discomfort and limit the harm caused by the weather, drink six to eight eight-ounce glasses of water every day. It is also helpful to apply lotion or cream to your skin immediately after bathing. (Name of official) suggests using makeup or cream with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to avoid sun damage and maintain soft, healthy skin.

Other steps to protect yourself include:

- **Liquids:** Listen to your body to be sure you are getting enough water every day. You probably are not getting enough if all of the following are true: your mouth is dry, you are excessively thirsty, you urinate less often than normal, you feel unwell, and you are dizzy when you stand up. Remember, you perspire even in cold weather. Replace fluid lost through perspiration. Also, for every 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity, drink another eight ounces of water.
- **The Air:** The drier the air, the drier your skin will become. Avoid using an electric blanket because it will make your skin dry. Wear warm, soft, layered clothing. Consider moisturizing the air with a vaporizer, a humidifier or pans of water on your radiators. But remember, too much moisture can cause condensation on walls, windows and floors that will promote mold and dust mite growth. Clean humidifiers

regularly so they do not become sources of mold and bacteria. To avoid burn injuries, place steam vaporizers out of the reach of young children.

- **Bathing Habits:** Avoid long, hot showers which wash away the skin's natural oils. Also, use lukewarm water and moisturizing soap, instead of regular, antibacterial or liquid soaps, which tend to dry the skin. Handcrafted soaps are usually "super-fatted," containing more oil than regular soaps, in the form of glycerin, cocoa butter, and/or vegetable oils, such as olive, coconut, palm, castor or avocado.
- **Moisturize:** While applying moisturizer, focus on your feet, arms, legs and hands. Wear rubber gloves for chores involving detergents or harsh cleansers and wear gloves or mittens while outdoors. If your hands are very dry, consider wearing thin gloves to bed after applying hand cream.
- **Dressing:** Wear cotton, silk, velour or fleece next to your skin. Wool can irritate dry, inflamed skin. On very cold days, wear a face mask.
- **Moisturize Your Hair:** Dry air creates fly-away hair. Switch to a gentle shampoo. Consider washing your hair less often and condition with a product for dry or damaged hair. Avoid frequent use of products containing alcohol and high-heat hair dryers or curling irons.

For more information about winter skin care, call the (county health agency name) at (telephone number).

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**Winter Travel Safety**

Harsh weather conditions can turn an outing into a tragedy. Before venturing out on slippery roads, consider if the trip is really necessary.

“If you must travel in bad weather, plan in advance how to make your trip as safe as possible. Drive at a reasonable speed, leave plenty of time for traveling, and be aware of hazards and pedestrians crossing the street. Leave time to brake in advance to avoid sliding,” said (name of title) of the (local health agency name).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests the following tips for winter travel safety:

- Listen for radio or television reports of travel advisories issued by the National Weather Service.
- Do not travel in low visibility conditions.
- If possible, avoid traveling alone.
- If you must travel by car in heavy snow or ice, use winter tires or tire chains and take a mobile phone with you. Let someone know your destination and when you expect to arrive.
- After a snowfall, brush off all windows, the roof of the car, windshield wipers, headlights, and tail lights so that other motorists can see you.
- Never pour water on your windshield to remove ice or snow. Shattering may occur.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered overpasses and bridges if possible.
- Keep well behind the vehicle traveling in front of you, at least twice the normal distance as in good weather. The increased distance is needed to avoid a crash if you have to stop.
- If you begin to skid, remain calm, ease your foot off the gas, and turn in the direction of the skid. To avoid skids, brake carefully and gently on snow or ice. Slowly squeeze the brakes. If your vehicle has anti-lock brakes, do not pump the brakes, instead apply a steady pressure.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full to avoid a gas line freeze.

- Stock your car with basic winter driving equipment: a scraper, brush, shovel, jumper cables, tow chain, a bag of sand for tire traction, road flares, a blanket, and a flashlight with batteries.
- Assemble winter survival kits including: bottled water, snack foods, candles, and matches (to be used to melt snow for drinking). Do not eat snow because it will lower your body temperature.
- Always carry additional warm clothing and footwear appropriate for the winter conditions.
- Have a cell phone in the car in case of an emergency. Make sure that it is fully charged. Staying in your vehicle when stranded is often the safest choice if winter storms create poor visibility or if roadways are ice-covered.

These steps will increase your safety when stranded:

- Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna as a signal to rescuers and raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing).
- Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area.
- Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers.
- Stay awake. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems.
- Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe - this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve your circulation and stay warmer.
- Huddle with other people for warmth.

Plan to be safe this winter. Knowledge of the area, weather and route, plus a little common sense can greatly help ensure a safe and enjoyable trip.

For more information about winter travel safety, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Public Health Emergencies and Winter Weather**

Snow and ice storms and freezing temperatures can turn a winter wonderland into a public health emergency that threatens people's health and safety. People with health problems and those with fragile immune systems are particularly at risk.

(Name and title) of the (local health agency name) strongly advises residents to begin today, before a winter storm strikes, to "winterize" their family emergency preparedness plans and learn how to avoid exposure to extreme cold conditions that can lead to hypothermia and frostbite.

"At home, make certain that you have extra water and food and know how you will manage during a power outage. A family's winter emergency plan should address how to keep people warm and dry if a winter storm knocks out power and electricity," (he/she) said.

Never use a generator indoors to produce electricity because your family can be poisoned by carbon monoxide fumes. When using a non-electric heater or wood stove to warm your house, you must have adequate ventilation to the outside to prevent a build-up of carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide is an invisible odorless, poisonous gas given off by generators and other alternative heating sources. Symptoms of exposure to carbon monoxide are similar to the flu but without a fever. At lower levels of exposure, a person may develop a headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, dizziness and shortness of breath. Exposure to very high levels of carbon monoxide can result in loss of consciousness and even death.

Exposure to the lower temperatures can also cause medical emergencies. Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that causes the body's core temperature to

drop dangerously low. Symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, confusion, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion and slurred speech. Infants with hypothermia may have little energy and bright red, cold skin.

Hypothermia can occur unexpectedly even in rooms in which temperatures are set at 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. People who are 65 and older should set their home thermostat no lower than 65 F. Those who are 75 and older should maintain home temperatures of 70 degrees F.

Frostbite is another serious cold weather condition, and is especially dangerous because it happens with little warning. “Numbness can occur so quickly that a person may not know it, and may remain outside, which increases the risk of permanent damage to the skin. Older people and those with diabetes are especially vulnerable to frostbite because of poor circulation,” (name of official) said.

To prevent hypothermia and frostbite, dress warmly and wear several layers of clothes to trap body heat. Go indoors when you begin to feel cold. Wear outer clothing that is tightly woven to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind.

Cold weather also puts an extra burden on the heart. “If you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, check with your doctor before shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Healthy adults, too, should dress warmly when working outside. You should go indoors if you begin to feel cold, and remember that the body is working overtime to keep warm,” (name of official) said.

For more information on staying healthy and safe during severe winter weather, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency).