HOW TO STAY WARM WITHOUT POWER

Close off rooms you do not need, block drafts under doors, layer clothing and blankets, and use only vented or approved heat sources, never a gas oven or stovetop. If the house gets too cold, go to a warming location or a place with power.

Reviewed October 29, 2026

A winter outage has two dangers: the cold itself, and the carbon monoxide (CO) and fire risks that come with heating a house the wrong way. This page covers both, in the order you will need them.

KEEP THE HEAT YOU HAVE

CDC says to keep as much heat as possible inside your home when the power goes out:

- Close off rooms you do not need.
- Stuff towels or rags in the cracks under doors.
- Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns rather than candles, if possible.

DRESS IN LAYERS

CDC's winter guidance on clothing:

- Wool, silk, or polypropylene hold more body heat than cotton.
- For an insulating layer, natural fibers like wool, goose down, or fleece work best.
- An outer layer protects you from wind, rain, and snow if you have to go outside.
- Stay dry. Wet clothing chills the body quickly.

CDC's power outage guidance lists extra blankets, sleeping bags, and warm winter coats as one way to stay warm when the power is out. Ready.gov says to gather supplies in case you need to stay home for several days without power, with extra batteries for radios and flashlights.

SAFE HEAT SOURCES DURING A POWER OUTAGE

CDC's power outage page lists these as heat sources to have:

- Extra blankets, sleeping bags, and warm winter coats.
- A fireplace that is up to code, with plenty of dry firewood, or a gas log fireplace.

- Portable space heaters or kerosene heaters.

Every source of combustion heat comes with conditions.

Fireplaces, wood stoves, and other combustion heaters. CDC says to use them only if they are properly vented to the outside. CDC's CO guidance says to have your chimney checked or cleaned every year, and its power outage page says to keep vents and flues free of debris, especially in high winds.

Kerosene heaters. CDC says to make sure you have proper ventilation if you must use one, and to check with your local fire department that kerosene heaters are legal in your area.

Space heaters. CDC and CPSC say:

- Keep heaters at least 3 feet from drapes, furniture, bedding, clothing, and anything else that can burn.
- Use electric space heaters with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements (CDC).
- Plug an electric heater directly into a wall outlet, never a power strip (CPSC).
- Never put a space heater on top of furniture or near water, and do not use one with a damaged cord or one that sparks (CDC).
- Do not leave a heater running unattended in a confined space, and keep children and pets away from it (CPSC).

An electric space heater needs electricity, so in an outage it only works on backup power. If that backup is a generator, follow generator safety.

CDC sums it up: if you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful, and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

HEAT SOURCES THAT CAN KILL YOU

WARNING

Never heat your home with a gas oven or stovetop (CDC, Ready.gov). CDC puts it plainly: "Turning on the stove for heat is not safe!" Never burn charcoal indoors, never use a portable gas camp stove indoors, and do not use portable flameless chemical heaters indoors.

Generators and grills belong outdoors only. Ready.gov says generators and fuel should be at least 20 feet from windows, doors, and attached garages, and CDC says at least 20 feet from any window, door, or vent. CPSC says never cook on a charcoal grill in a garage, even with the door open.

Candles are a fire risk. CPSC recommends flashlights or battery-operated candles. If you do use real candles, keep them away from anything that can burn and never leave them unattended.

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS AND SYMPTOMS

Install battery-operated or battery backup CO alarms near every sleeping area (CDC) and on every level of the home (Ready.gov). CPSC also says to keep snow clear of outside vents for furnaces and other fuel-burning appliances.

CDC lists the most common CO poisoning symptoms as headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. People who are asleep or have been drinking can die before they have symptoms. If a CO alarm sounds, CPSC says get outside immediately and call 911.

If you smell or hear gas, CPSC says leave immediately, do not operate electronics, and call the gas company from outside.

HYPOTHERMIA: SIGNS AND WHAT TO DO

CDC says those most at risk include older adults with inadequate food, clothing, or heating, and babies sleeping in cold bedrooms. Check on them first.

Warning signs, per CDC:

- **Adults:** shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness.
- **Babies:** bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

DO THIS

If you see these signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°F, it is an emergency: get medical attention immediately (CDC).

If you cannot get medical help right away, CDC says:

- Move the person to a warm room or shelter and remove any wet clothing.
- Warm the center of the body first: chest, neck, head, and groin.
- Warm drinks can help, but no alcohol, and never give a drink to someone who is unconscious.
- Once their temperature rises, keep them dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.

- If the person is unconscious and seems to have no pulse or breathing, get emergency help. CDC says to perform CPR, even if the person appears dead.

FROSTBITE: SIGNS AND WHAT TO DO

CDC says redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign. Other signs are a white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, and numbness. Because the skin is numb, a person often does not notice.

CDC's steps:

1. Check for hypothermia first. It is more serious and needs emergency care.
2. Get into a warm room as soon as possible.
3. Put the affected area in warm, not hot, water. It should feel comfortable on unaffected skin. If warm water is not available, body heat can warm frostbitten fingers.
4. Do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes unless you have to.
5. Do not rub or massage the area, and do not use snow on it.
6. Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, stove, fireplace, or radiator to warm it. Numb skin burns easily.
7. Get medical care.

WHEN TO LEAVE

If the cold is extreme, Ready.gov says to go to a community location with power and to check with local officials about heating locations open near you. CDC says that if conditions are too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter. Decide early, especially for older adults, babies, and anyone who is ill, rather than waiting until someone shows signs of hypothermia.

For the rest of an outage plan, see what to do when the power goes out. Supplies are listed in the cold weather outage kit.

WINTER OUTAGE CHECKLIST

BEFORE WINTER

- [ ] Extra blankets, sleeping bags, and warm coats for everyone
- [ ] Wool, silk, or polypropylene layers
- [ ] Battery or battery backup CO alarms near sleeping areas and on every level
- [ ] Flashlights or battery lanterns and extra batteries
- [ ] Chimney checked or cleaned
- [ ] Know where local warming locations are

WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT

- [ ] Close off unused rooms
- [ ] Stuff towels under doors
- [ ] Never heat with a gas oven or stovetop
- [ ] Fireplaces and stoves only if vented to the outside
- [ ] Space heaters 3 feet from anything that can burn
- [ ] Generators and grills outdoors only
- [ ] Keep snow off outside furnace and appliance vents

WATCH FOR

- [ ] Shivering, confusion, fumbling hands, slurred speech, drowsiness
- [ ] Babies with bright red, cold skin or very low energy
- [ ] Temperature below 95°F: get medical attention immediately
- [ ] White, grayish-yellow, waxy, or numb skin
- [ ] CO alarm: get outside and call 911

TRACK	Power outage
SHEET	4 of 9
REVIEWED	October 29, 2026

COMPILED FROM THESE SOURCES

1. CDC, Safety Guidelines: During and After a Winter Storm
2. CDC, What to Do to Protect Yourself During a Power Outage
3. CDC, Preventing Hypothermia
4. CDC, Preventing Frostbite
5. CDC, Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning Basics
6. Ready.gov, Winter Weather
7. Ready.gov, Power Outages
8. CPSC, Winter Storm May Knock Out Power; CPSC Warns of Deadly Carbon Monoxide and Fire Risks (2026)

Every safety claim on this sheet links to its primary source.