

Health Unit Media Release

January 17, 2011



Health Unit alerts the public to be cautious during cold weather

The Leeds Grenville and Lanark District **Health Unit alert's the public to take appropriate precautions during the cold weather.** This colder weather is expected to last throughout today.

Some conditions during cold weather can cause very serious health conditions and even death. With a wind chill of -15°C or colder, unprotected skin can freeze in under 30 minutes, and the risk of developing hypothermia is very high. **During very cold weather, everyone is at risk, however the elderly, infants and children, people taking certain prescription medications, and people with pre-existing health conditions are in greater danger.** There is also an increased risk of hypothermia for outdoor workers and people living without adequate heat or shelter.

During these cold temperatures, the Health Unit strongly encourages the public to check on a neighbour or friend who may be isolated, disabled, or living alone and have a greater risk of suffering cold weather related injuries. The Health Unit also encourages homeless people to get in from the cold.

During cold weather everyone should take the following precautions:

- Wear layers of warm dry clothing including a hat, mitts, and a layer to block the wind
- Drink warm non-alcoholic beverages, non-caffeinated beverages such as herbal teas, apple cider or soup.
- Cover exposed skin surfaces when outdoors
- Maintain a heated environment of around 20°C/ 68°F
- Be aware of how your medications or health conditions may increase your risk
- Be aware of the early signs of frostbite: white or gray spots on skin or areas having lost feeling. Tingling and pain can also be a warning sign of frost bite usually in the hands, feet, nose and ears.
- Beware of the early signs of hypothermia: unable to think clearly, shivering, loss of memory, lethargy slurred speech or loss of consciousness. Immediate medical attention is required.
- Be aware of the dangers of using an oven or space heater as a heating device.

For more information on how to protect yourself during extreme cold visit the Health Unit website at: www.healthunit.org or go to <http://www.mb.ec.gc.ca/air/wintersevere/index.en.html> or <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>. For specific cold weather questions call the Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685.