

Severe Winter Weather and Storm Preparedness Guide



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Know the Risks

SEVERE WINTER WEATHER AND STORMS IN B.C.

This guide is a must-read for everyone living in and visiting B.C. through the winter months. It will help you prepare and know what to do when severe winter weather and storms arrive.

Winter weather can affect your safety in different ways:

Snow, rain and ice, can cause transportation challenges and increase the risk of slips and falls.

Power outages can disrupt communication, the heat in your home and access to food and water.

It is easy to get cold quickly if you are outside in wet, cold and windy weather. Exposure to cold temperatures can lead to frostbite or hypothermia.

There can be an increased risk of flooding due to melting snow.



IMPORTANT: Be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning. In the event of a power outage, never heat your home with a gas stovetop or oven. Never use a camp stove, barbecue or propane or kerosene heater indoors. Use gas-powered generators and grills outdoors and away from windows. For more information, visit:

[Gov.bc.ca/CarbonMonoxideAwareness](https://www.gov.bc.ca/CarbonMonoxideAwareness)

SEVERE WINTER WEATHER AND ALERTS

Winter weather conditions can quickly become dangerous with little or no warning. Protect yourself and others by learning more about the different kinds of winter hazards you might encounter and how to prepare.



REMINDER: B.C. is a large province. The climate varies significantly from one region to another with some of the wettest climates in Canada as well as some of the driest. Don't wait for alerts; always be prepared.

Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a variety of severe winter weather alerts to notify the public about hazardous winter conditions, such as:

- Arctic outflow warning (Coastal B.C.)
- Blizzard
- Flash freeze
- Freezing drizzle, freezing rain
- Snowfall
- Rainfall
- Extreme cold

The type of alert issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada depends on the severity and timing of the event, as well as the region you're in. Learning the difference will help you understand what actions to take. It's important to follow the weather forecast where you live.

Severe Winter Weather and Storm Preparedness Guide

Type of Alert

Description



Warning

Urgent message that severe weather is either occurring or will occur.



Watch

Alerts you about weather conditions where there is potential for a significant storm or severe weather. A Watch may upgrade to a Warning as certainty about the path and strength of a storm system increases.



Advisory

Issued for specific weather events (like blowing snow, fog, freezing drizzle and frost) that are less severe, but could still significantly impact people.



Special Weather Statement

The least urgent type of alert. Issued to let you know that conditions are unusual and could cause concern.

Warming centres may be opened for the public by First Nations and local governments in response to extreme cold events. **Temporary winter shelters** and **extreme weather response shelter** spaces are funded by BC Housing and operated by community partners for people experiencing homelessness.

Find a warming centre or shelter by contacting your Band office or local government.



Climate Change Connection

Winter weather in B.C. is getting warmer and, in much of the province, wetter. However, this does not mean that winter weather will be less severe. It's important to be prepared for a variety of winter weather conditions.

Even with climate change, we will still experience cold, snow, wind and winter storms, but they may occur in places or in ways they haven't before.

Other emerging climate change trends, like more severe wintertime coastal flooding and more frequent rain-on-snow events, will challenge our resilience to winter weather.

As temperatures continue to rise, we become more adapted to warmer temperatures and less prepared for colder temperatures. This means that when cold weather hits, communities feel the impacts of storms even more.



Before Winter

1. MAKE A PLAN

Thinking ahead and creating an emergency plan with winter-specific considerations will strengthen your ability to respond and recover.

When making your plan, keep the following in mind:

- Public transportation may be cancelled.
- Driving, walking and cycling could be very dangerous due to slippery or snowy roads.
- Phone, gas, electric and water services may be disrupted during a power outage.

Download PreparedBC's fill-in-the-blanks emergency plan from PreparedBC.ca and complete the checklist below.

- 
1. Identify your hazards.
 2. Make an emergency plan with out-of-area contact(s).
 3. Assign someone to collect your kid(s) from daycare or school if you can't.
 4. Identify a back-up plan for heating your home and powering important medical equipment if there is a power outage.
 5. Learn how to turn off utilities.
 6. Store emergency water (4 litres per person per day) and food for 3 days to 2 weeks.
 7. Make a plan for keeping pets and animals warm and sheltered.
 8. Make grab-and-go bags, keep one in your vehicle.



2. IDENTIFY A WINTER WEATHER BUDDY

If you or someone you know lives alone or experiences mobility limitations in winter weather, make connections to find a winter weather buddy. Check in with each other when winter weather arrives.

Your buddy should be someone who can help with shoveling snow or removing leaves from drains to prevent flooding. They can also help run errands or gather supplies if you can't leave your home.



TIP: If you know someone who relies on power for medical equipment, make sure to check in on them during power outages.

Name

Contact info

.....

.....

.....

3. PREPARE YOUR HOME

Take steps to winterize your home, such as:

- Insulate walls and attics.
- Install weather-stripping along doors and windows.
- Learn how to keep pipes from freezing.

Check with your service provider for details on insulation and heat rebate programs or emergency power assistance funds.

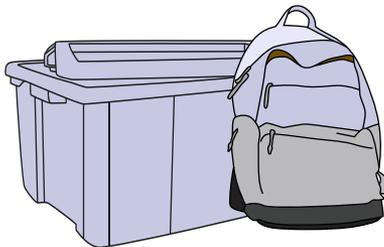
Should you have an emergency kit or a grab-and-go bag?

The answer is, you need both.

- An emergency kit is used during an emergency when you must stay at home, such as a power outage during a winter storm.
- A grab-and-go bag is a smaller version of an emergency kit that you can take with you if you need to leave home in a hurry.



Include important items, such as traditional medicines and cultural items, in your grab-and-go bag.



4. PREPARE FOR POWER OUTAGES

Severe winter weather like ice, wind and snow can cause power outages. It's important to be prepared to live without power for several days.



Consider how you will keep warm if the power is out.



Have a licensed contractor perform furnace and fireplace maintenance ahead of winter every year.



Install carbon monoxide alarms if you have an attached garage, wood stove, propane heater or other fuel-burning appliances.



Include a battery-operated radio and a flashlight with extra batteries in your emergency kit.

Consider how people with disabilities or people requiring assistance may be affected during a power outage:

- How will you leave home without elevator service (if applicable)?
- Do you have a plan for a backup power supply for essential medical equipment?

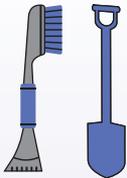


POWER OUTAGE TIP: Keep doors of refrigerators and freezers closed during a power outage. Keep the cold air in and avoid spoiling food. Follow [@BCHydro](#) for more tips.

5. PREPARE YOUR VEHICLE

Ensure your vehicle is prepared for winter with proper maintenance.

- Keep your gas tank at least half full or your electric vehicle half charged at all times.
- Create a vehicle emergency kit with the following winter-specific items:



Windshield scraper and shovel



Jumper cables and tow rope



Mittens, hat, blanket (extra items to stay warm)



Reflective triangle or clothing



Sand or non-clumping kitty litter for better tire traction



Antifreeze and windshield washer fluid

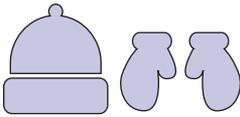
Install winter tires. They provide better traction in cold temperatures and in snow, slush and icy conditions.

Visit [ShiftIntoWinter.ca](https://www.shiftintowinter.ca) for more information.

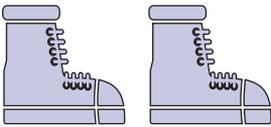


6. STAYING WARM OUTSIDE

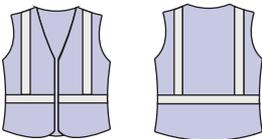
When you're outside in severe winter weather for work or recreation, stay warm and protected. Wear appropriate clothing and gear, such as:



A hat and gloves to prevent heat loss.



Waterproof winter boots with good grip to prevent falls on slippery roads.



Bright colours and reflective clothing so vehicles can see you.



Clothes in layers with a wind-resistant outer layer.



Visit **AdventureSmart.ca** for winter safety tips if you are planning to enjoy the outdoors. Also check Avalanche Canada at **Avalanche.ca** for the avalanche forecast before heading into the backcountry.

During Winter

7. FOLLOW ALERTS AND TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Check the forecast frequently when winter arrives. Conditions can change quickly. Follow all alerts and travel advisories related to incoming or current winter weather.

If you don't need to be on the road, stay home.

- Visit [DriveBC.ca](https://drivebc.ca) for current road and highway conditions.
- Visit [TranBC.ca](https://tranbc.ca) for travel and vehicle safety information.



Downed power lines are dangerous and are considered an emergency. Call 9-1-1 to report it. Stay back at least 10 metres (the length of a city bus), or stay in your vehicle, until help arrives.

8. ACTIVATE YOUR PLAN

Trust in your preparedness. Contact your winter weather buddy and activate your emergency plan as needed.



TIP: Heavy snow followed by heavy rain or warmer temperatures can lead to floods. Get prepared and learn more with the Prepared BC Flood Preparedness Guide.

9. KNOW WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION

Pay attention to trusted media outlets, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Emergency Info BC and community sources for more information and alerts related to winter weather.

You can do this by following the trusted sources below.

Environment and Climate Change Canada



[Weather.gc.ca](https://weather.gc.ca)



[WeatherCan mobile app](#)



[HelloWeather \(automated weather forecast\)](#)



[English: 1-833-794-3556](tel:1-833-794-3556) or [1-833-79HELLO](tel:1-833-79HELLO)



[French: 1-833-586-3836](tel:1-833-586-3836) or [1-833-58METEO](tel:1-833-58METEO)

First Nations Health Authority (FNHA)



[Fnha.ca](https://fnha.ca)



[@FNHA](#)



[First Nations Health Authority](#)

Drive BC



[DriveBC.ca](https://drivebc.ca)



[@DriveBC](#)

BC Hydro



[BChydro.com](https://bchydro.com)



[@BChydro](#)

Emergency Info BC



[EmergencyInfoBC.ca](https://emergencyinfobc.ca)



[@EmergencyInfoBC](#)

Stay Prepared

10. STAY PREPARED

Severe winter weather, floods and power outages can happen anytime during winter months.

If you used anything from your emergency kit or grab-and-go bag, replace it after the weather has improved or your power is back on.

Set a reminder on your phone to review and update your home emergency plan, emergency kit, and grab-and-go bags at least once a year.

11. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit [PreparedBC.ca](https://www.preparedbc.ca) or follow [@PreparedBC](https://www.facebook.com/PreparedBC) on Facebook, Instagram and X to learn how to prepare for, respond to, and recover from other hazards in B.C. such as floods, earthquakes and wildfires.

- BC Centre for Disease Control: [bccdc.ca](https://www.bccdc.ca)
- BC Emergency Health Services: [bcehs.ca](https://www.bcehs.ca)
- BC Housing: [bchousing.org](https://www.bchousing.org)
- First Nations Health Authority: [fnha.ca](https://www.fnha.ca)
- First Nations' Emergency Services Society: [fness.bc.ca](https://www.fness.bc.ca)
- Environment and Climate Change Canada: [weather.gc.ca](https://www.weather.gc.ca)
- Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium: [pacificclimate.org](https://www.pacificclimate.org)



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