



**Department for
the Aging**

Fall/Winter 2010

Take Extra Precautions in Cold Weather

*—Low-income seniors should apply for the Home
Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) by calling 311—*

With winter weather here, the New York City Department for the Aging suggests the following health and safety precautions to take during the winter season:

- Wear a hat, hood or scarf, as most heat is lost through the head.
- Dress warmly in layers of clothing, rather than a single outerwear item, to provide better insulation from the cold.
- Keep clothing dry. If clothes become wet while outside, change into dry clothes as soon as possible.
- Drinking alcohol increases the risk of hypothermia and frostbite.

The elderly are at increased risk of hypothermia, a potentially life-threatening condition in which body temperature drops below 95°F. Symptoms include: confusion or mental disorientation; fatigue and irregular heartbeat. Additional symptoms may include shivering, slurred speech, memory loss, sleepiness, cool or pale skin, slightly blue lips or numbness in the hands and feet. Anyone suspected of developing hypothermia should be brought into a warm environment and seen by a medical professional as quickly as possible.

Frostbite, another cold weather condition, can affect any area of the body exposed to cold temperatures – most frequently extremities including fingers, toes, ears and the nose. Areas of the body affected by frostbite should be warmed quickly, using care to avoid intense heat. Frostbite should also be treated by a medical professional.

Indoor precautions to take during the cold weather season:

- Ensure all fuel-burning equipment in the home (furnaces, boilers, hot water heaters and clothes dryers) is operating properly, ventilated and regularly inspected by a professional to avoid unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Electric heaters should be used with extreme caution to avoid shock, fire and burns.
- Keep combustible material (furniture, drapes and carpeting) at least three feet from a heat source.
- Gas ovens and burners should never be used in the home in place of central heating or portable heaters.
- Portable fuel-burning heaters are illegal for indoor use in New York City. Use only equipment that is approved for indoor use.

Low-income seniors may be eligible for a Home Energy Assistance Program [HEAP] grant to help pay heating and electric bills. In the event of a heat deficiency, tenants should first notify the building superintendent. If heat is not restored, or for information about the New York City Department for the Aging's HEAP program, dial 311.