

Power Outages

Electrical power outages can happen at any time. They often occur during a storm or after an accident when power lines are damaged. The power company may get the power back on soon. At other times, power may be off for several days.

Sometimes the power company turns off the electricity to an area to save power for one to two hours at a time. The power is restored and then turned off to another area. This is called a rolling blackout. The electricity is most often turned off during times of high use. The power company tries to give warning before turning off power to an area.

If you have medical equipment such as a battery-powered wheelchair or an oxygen concentrator in your home that requires electrical power, let your power company know. They will put you on a list to restore your power more quickly. Also, check with the supplier of your medical equipment for battery backups or backup oxygen tanks in case of a power outage.

Be Prepared

To prepare for a sudden loss of power, have these supplies ready:

- Flashlights and extra batteries or wind up flashlights that do not need batteries
- Battery powered radio and extra batteries
- Food and bottled water for each member of the family
- A phone that does not need electrical power to work
- Battery backups for medical equipment or backup oxygen tanks
- Extra blankets and warm clothing
- Food and water for pets

During Power Outages

- Use a flashlight for emergency lighting. If you need to use candles, never leave them burning when you leave the room or go to sleep.
- Turn off electrical equipment to prevent a surge of electricity when the power comes back on.

- Avoid opening the refrigerator and freezer so food stays cold.
- Listen to the radio for information.
- Use the phone for emergencies only.
- Call 911 only in a life-threatening emergency.
- Limit travel. Traffic lights and gas pumps may not work.
- Seek shelter with family, friends or at a community shelter if the power is out for a long time, or when it is very hot or cold.

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

During a power outage, people may use other types of fuel for heating and cooking. **Using propane, kerosene or other types of fuel in a closed building can cause carbon monoxide (CO) to build up** and poison the people inside. CO is a gas that has no odor and no color. If inhaled, it can cause sudden illness, loss of consciousness and death. The most common signs of CO poisoning are:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Chest pain
- Confusion

People who are exposed to CO while sleeping may die before waking up. One early sign of CO poisoning is mental confusion. If you suspect CO poisoning, **have everyone go outside right away and then call 911.**

To prevent CO poisoning, have at least one carbon monoxide detector with a battery backup in your home. Check that it works and replace the battery every 6 months. Other ways to prevent CO poisoning:

- **Never** use a gas range or oven to heat a home.
- **Never** use a grill, camp stove, generator or any gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal burning device inside a home, garage or other building even if the doors or windows are open.
- **Never** use a grill, camp stove, generator or any gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal burning device near a window, door or vent where the gases can go into the building.
- **Never** leave a car running in a closed garage.

- **Never** hook a generator directly to your home's wiring. Connect appliances or equipment directly to the outlets on the generator. Get advice from an electrician on how to safely use a generator.

Food Safety

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Check the temperature of food before you eat it. **Throw away any food that gets warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.**

The food in your refrigerator:

- If the power is out less than two hours, the food should be safe to eat.
- If the power is out more than two hours, pack the food in a cooler and put ice around it.

The food in your freezer:

- If your freezer is half full, the food should stay safe for 24 hours.
- If the freezer is full, the food should stay safe for 48 hours.

Water Safety

If the power goes out in a large area, water may not be safe for drinking, cooking and washing. The local health department will issue alerts about the safety of water for drinking, cooking and washing.

If your water is not safe to drink, use bottled or boiled water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food and wash your hands. Use bottled water to make baby formula. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to clean your hands. Use bottled or boiled water until health officials tell you your water supply is safe. For boiled water, bring water to a rapid boil for one minute to kill most germs and parasites.

Extreme Heat

If you have no air conditioning during a power outage and the weather is very hot, there is a risk for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and fainting. Heat stroke is very serious and can cause death if not treated right away. With heat stroke, the body cannot control its own temperature, sweating stops and the body temperature may rise very fast.

The signs of heat stroke are:

- Red, hot and dry skin
- No sweating
- Rapid and strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness
- A body temperature over 103 degrees Fahrenheit

To prevent and treat heat stroke:

- Drink a glass of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes and at least one gallon each day. Do not drink alcohol or caffeine. These fluids can dehydrate you.
- Wear lightweight, light colored, loose clothes.
- Go to a cool place, sit or lie down, drink water, and wash your face with cool water if you feel dizzy, weak or overheated. If you do not feel better soon, **call 911**.
- Cool yourself by getting in a cool bath, taking a cool shower or wrapping yourself in a cool, wet sheet.
- Check your body temperature and continue cooling efforts until body temperature drops below 101 degrees Fahrenheit or medical help arrives.
- Open windows if outdoor air quality is good.

Extreme Cold

If you have no heat during a power outage and the weather is very cold, there is a high risk of hypothermia. This is when a person's body temperature is below 95 degrees Fahrenheit or 35 degrees Celsius.

Hypothermia is caused by a sudden loss of body heat most often from being in cold water or cold temperatures.

The signs of hypothermia are:

- Confusion
- Sleepiness
- Disorientation
- Mumbled speech

- Trouble walking or moving
- Changes in behavior

To prevent hypothermia:

- Eat and drink plenty of food and fluids
- Wear layers of clothing
- Move around
- Change your clothes if they are wet
- Stay indoors

If you think a person has hypothermia, **call 911**. A person with hypothermia needs to be re-warmed slowly. Until help arrives, give the person a warm drink and wrap the person with blankets. **Do not** rub or massage the person's skin. **Do not** use heat or hot water. **Do not** give alcohol to drink.