

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE



To/Destinataire	Mayor and Members of Council	File/N° de fichier: File Number
From/Expéditeur	Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health Donna Gray, General Manager, Community and Social Services Kim Ayotte, General Manager, Emergency and Protective Services	
Subject/Objet	Response to Extreme Cold Weather	Date: February 24, 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update outlining the City's actions when an extreme cold weather event is forecasted for the City of Ottawa.

Background

Extreme cold weather events can result in significant adverse health impacts. To address these impacts, a City of Ottawa Extreme Heat, Cold and Smog Plan was developed specific to weather-related extreme heat, extreme cold and poor outdoor air quality. This plan outlines the prevention, mitigation, and preparedness activities in which the City of Ottawa and community partners respond to these events.

The City's Heat, Cold and Smog Planning Committee, chaired by Ottawa Public Health (OPH), meets regularly and updates the plan and resources for partners and residents in preparation for the cold weather season. This committee is made up of City departments and community partners including The Salvation Army Outreach Services, the Canadian Red Cross Ottawa Branch, Ottawa Community Housing, and Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario.

The plan is activated when Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) forecasts windchill values that pose an increased risk of frostbite to residents. It provides the basis for preventative strategies for the City and service providers. For people experiencing homelessness, this includes ensuring access to warm indoor spaces, programming and services.

Preparing for an extreme cold weather event

Service providers who assist people at risk during the cold receive pre-season information on services, resources and prevention strategies and are reminded of these resources as part of each Frostbite Advisory and Frostbite Warning messaging. This pre-season information is also shared with the Board of Health and City Council. OPH disseminates Frostbite Advisories (-25 windchill or colder) and Warnings (-35 C windchill or colder) via social media and by email to community agencies that assist people at risk during cold weather to alert them when Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) forecasts windchill values at or below these thresholds.

1. Communications

OPH is responsible for communications to raise awareness of actions to prevent cold weather-related illness, injuries and deaths. These communications are sent to the public, to Council and to service providers who support priority populations.

It is recommended that individuals enroll on the ECCC [WeatherCAN](#) app to receive weather alerts directly. The OPH Cold Weather website is updated regularly with current information and resources.

The City's Community and Social Services (CSSD), OC Transpo, and other City Services may also communicate specific information related to their services. The Public Information and Media Relations unit (PIMR) shares OPH messaging and coordinates any joint communication required from specific City services. PIMR can amplify the reach of the other departments/services by posting messaging on the corporate social media channels.

2. Cold Weather Assistance to People Experiencing Homelessness

The Community and Social Services Department (CSSD) and community partners ensure that those experiencing homelessness have access to safe and warm emergency shelters during an extreme cold weather event. Within the emergency shelter system, space is available for those in need. Anyone who is unsheltered can access services 24/7 by calling 3-1-1 or presenting themselves at a shelter. If a member of the general public views someone who requires assistance in getting out of the cold, they can call 3-1-1, or 9-1-1 if it is a medical emergency. City staff will work with community shelter partners to secure a placement.

CSSD's Housing Services currently operates temporary Physical Distancing Centres to support the single adult community shelter system and works closely with partners to ensure adequate space is available as part of their winter response plan.

It is important to note that the City does not open special warming centres to augment shelter capacity. As part of its winter response, the City regularly reviews emergency

shelter accommodation needs and capacity to ensure space is available. During extreme cold weather events, outreach services operate on a 24-hour basis to connect with unsheltered individuals and bring them to safe shelter. Those who are unsheltered during winter are provided with winter gear, including sleeping bags suitable for -30 weather, additional blankets, clothing, and handwarmers. Outreach services and other partners stock extra supplies to ensure residents who choose to remain outside during an extreme cold weather event can stay warm.

The City's Emergency Services and other City services also look for individuals in need while travelling throughout the city on calls or returning from calls.

The Office of Emergency Management works closely with OPH, CSSD and others to monitor various indicators during extreme cold events. Should there be a need for an enhanced response (e.g., to support escalating situations involving critical infrastructure or other concurrent emergency), the City is prepared to mobilize the Emergency Operations Centre.

OPH and the Extreme Heat, Cold and Smog Committee members share situational awareness information from the OPH epidemiology team and/or community partners on how their clients are doing during an extreme cold event, including how many people are seeking care at local Emergency Departments for cold temperature related injuries.

3. Resources for all residents

The OPH Cold Weather [webpage](#) has information about preventing cold related injuries, such as frostbite and hypothermia, and includes links to resources in our community to help people access winter clothing, hot meals and food, assistance with home heating costs, finding emergency shelter (including transportation to shelter), and the locations of free public places to warm up.

Based on recent feedback, OPH has updated the Cold Weather webpage to make it easier to navigate.

Residents can call 2-1-1, the Community Navigation of Eastern Ontario, to obtain program information and locations of drop-in centres and shelters, community and health resource centres, food banks and community food programs, winter clothing, and financial assistance with utilities.

Procedures for 3-1-1 staff related to extreme weather are regularly reviewed by subject matter experts at OPH to ensure accuracy and consistency in 3-1-1 messaging. In addition to existing procedures, 3-1-1 staff also receive up-to-date information via media advisories and public service announcements related to extreme weather that can be relayed to concerned residents.

Next Steps

The City of Ottawa and partners will continue to plan, monitor, and respond to extreme cold system needs over the winter. Additional communications will be sent before an extreme heat event is forecast.

Thank you for your ongoing support and cooperation during this time.

Respectfully,

Dr. Vera Etches

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cc: Senior Leadership Team