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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Forecast for colder, snowier season means older Ohioans should be “Winter READY!”**

*Plan ahead to prevent common winter injuries and be prepared for emergencies*

**Columbus, Ohio** – Weather experts are expecting Winter 2016 to be colder and snowier than in recent years. Extreme weather conditions are hard on all of us, but can be particularly challenging for older adults, whose bodies don’t react the same way they did when they were younger. As a result, elders can be slower to adjust to adverse conditions and are at increased risk for injury from accidents, like slipping and falling. During Winter Safety Awareness Week (Nov. 13-19), the Ohio Department of Aging encourages all older Ohioans and their families to plan today to be “Winter READY!”

“Ohio winters can be unpredictable, but are likely to bring snow, ice, extremely cold temperatures, wind and more – all of which can create significant hazards for anyone, but especially our elders.” said Stephanie M. Loucka, director of the department. “Make a plan today to minimize your risk from wintry conditions and maximize your ability to remain active, independent and healthy all winter long.”

**Stay active safely**

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalization and death among Ohioans aged 65 and older, and the risk for a life-changing fall goes up in snowy and icy conditions. However, even winter falls can be prevented.

- Maintain regular physical activity to ensure you have the strength and balance you need to prevent falls. Ask your doctor or physical therapist about easy indoor exercises and seek opportunities to be active.
- Invest in extra lamps, nightlights and exterior lights so that you can always see where you are walking, especially around doorways and stairs. Use the highest-wattage bulbs recommended for your fixtures.
- Coats, gloves, hats and other winter clothing are designed to keep you warm, but items that are bulky, don’t fit well or can catch on nearby objects can increase your risk of falling.
- Wear boots and shoes that fit properly and have soles with good traction. Keep shoes and walking aids (canes, walkers) in good working condition, dry and free of snow, ice, dirt and mud.
- Keep sidewalks and stairs outside your home clean of ice and snow. Make sure steps leading into your home have sturdy handrails that can support you if you slip.
- Keep space heaters, cords and blankets out of walkways. If you must use throw rugs on cold floors, secure them to the floor with tape.
- Carry a cell phone and designate someone to call for help if you need it. Let loved ones know when you are leaving the house and when you expect to be back; call them after you return home.

Find more tips to prevent falls at the Department of Aging’s STEADY U Ohio website: [www.steadyu.ohio.gov](http://www.steadyu.ohio.gov).

**Heat your home safely**

Older adults are at increased risk for tragic consequences resulting from a fire in their homes. However, like falls, most fires can be prevented.

- Use only space heaters that have been tested and certified to the latest safety standards.
- Keep anything that can burn (papers, blankets, etc.) at least three feet way from any heat source.
- Test your smoke alarms monthly and replace any that are more than 10 years old.
- Have and practice a fire escape plan.

### **Be prepared**

All Ohioans should have a winter preparedness plan that enables them to remain in place for three days if they become unable to leave their homes due to weather conditions. Older adults may have a few special considerations.

- Have an emergency kit that contains, at a minimum, a battery operated radio, flashlight, extra batteries, a loud whistle or bell, food you can open and prepare easily, water (one gallon per person per day), extra blankets and a first aid kit.
- Keep a backup supply of the medicines you take every day. Have an ice chest on hand and keep ice packs in the freezer for medications that need to be kept cool.
- Make sure your medical equipment and assistive devices (such as canes, walkers, wheelchairs, lifts, oxygen tanks, etc.) are easy to locate in an emergency. Have spare batteries and non-powered options for equipment that will not work without electricity.
- Designate a safe place to go if it becomes unsafe to stay in your home, such as a public shelter or a friend's or neighbor's house. Have a plan for getting there.
- Be ready to quickly explain to rescue personnel in an emergency how to help you move safely and quickly (e.g., "take my oxygen tank," "get my insulin from the refrigerator").

### **Check on your neighbors**

Before, during and after forecasted severe weather, check on older friends and family members to ensure that they are okay and that they have the resources they need to stay safe and healthy.

- Do they need medical attention?
- Do they have safe food and water?
- Is the temperature in their home comfortable?
- Who will they call if they need help?
- If someone appears ill or is injured, call 9-1-1 immediately.

### **Find help in your community**

The Department of Aging works with the state's 12 area agencies on aging to make sure that each community has a plan for assisting older adults during weather emergencies. Your area agency can also help you identify resources, such as energy assistance, chore service and minor home repairs that can help you stay warm and safe this winter. Call 1-866-243-5678 to be connected to the agency serving your community.

Follow the Ohio Department of Aging on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more winter safety information and resources all winter long.

The Department of Aging is a proud member of the Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness. Visit [www.weathersafety.ohio.gov](http://www.weathersafety.ohio.gov) for information on winter safety and severe weather preparedness.

**About ODA** – The Ohio Department of Aging works to ensure that our elders are respected as vital members of society who continue to grow, thrive and contribute. We collaborate with state agencies and community partners, including area agencies on aging, to help integrate aging needs into local plans and ensure that aging Ohioans have access to a wide array of high-quality services and supports that are person-centered in policy and practice. Our programs include the PASSPORT Medicaid waiver, caregiver support, the long-term care ombudsman program, the Golden Buckeye Card and more. Visit [www.aging.ohio.gov](http://www.aging.ohio.gov).

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