

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, December 15, 2011, Peterborough

Do You Know What To Do in Extreme Cold?

Health Unit Activates Extreme Cold Response Plan for Peterborough City and County

With the colder winter months ahead, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit has activated its Extreme Cold Response Plan (ECRP) to advise residents on the best way to protect their health when temperatures plummet.

Cold weather, combined with wind, can cause serious injuries or even death. The Health Unit monitors the forecasted weather conditions from November 1 to April 1. The ECRP defines a series of cold weather thresholds that trigger the Health Unit to notify the general public, healthcare providers and community service providers of appropriate measures they can take to reduce the risk of cold weather injuries for themselves and the vulnerable populations they serve. Notifications of extreme cold will be posted on www.pcchu.ca and issued to the media and stakeholder groups when the forecasted temperature or wind chill may result in an increased risk of frostbite.

“Cold weather injuries, such as frostbite and hypothermia, are preventable,” says Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health. “Most healthy people can tolerate a short period of cold weather if dry and properly attired. Our plan is designed to advise those who are the most vulnerable and at the highest risk of cold weather injuries how to protect themselves.” Dr. Pellizzari notes that vulnerable populations in our communities include the elderly, infants (under one year), people with chronic physical and mental disabilities, and people who are homeless or marginally housed.

The Health Unit ECRP has three levels of notification: Frostbite Alert, Frostbite Warning, and Cold Weather Emergency. Public health messages as well as actions taken by the Health Unit will vary depending on the level of notification, as described below:

Level 1: Frostbite Alert

A Level 1 Frostbite Alert is issued when meteorologists forecast a temperature of -27°C to -38°C or a wind chill of -27 to -38. This level of notification reminds residents to:

NEWS RELEASE

Communications Office

Peterborough County-City Health Unit
10 Hospital Drive
Peterborough, ON K9J 8M1
(705) 743-1000, ext. 391
www.pcchu.ca



cover unprotected skin; avoid prolonged outdoor exposure; drink warm fluids; watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia; check on neighbours; and maintain a warm indoor environment (ideally 20°C or warmer).

Level 2: Frostbite Warning

A Level 2 Frostbite Warning is issued when meteorologists forecast a temperature between -39°C and -47°C or a wind chill of -39 to -47. This level of notification reminds residents of the core messages above in addition to: reminding children and the elderly to stay indoors; advising the general public to reduce time spent outdoors; and advising the public to check their faces and extremities frequently for signs of frostbite.

Level 3: Cold Weather Emergency

A Level 3 Cold Weather Emergency is issued when meteorologists forecast a temperature of -48°C or colder or a wind chill of -48 or colder OR when the temperature is below -27°C or a wind chill below -27 accompanied by a contributing risk factor such as a power outage, or critical infrastructure failure. This level of notification reminds residents of all the core messages above in addition to: requesting that residents stay indoors; ensuring vulnerable individuals are in a warm, safe environment; and advising the public to check their faces and extremities frequently for signs of frostbite. Further information about the Health Unit's ECRP is available on www.pcchu.ca.

The Health Unit recognizes that other community organizations may have developed their own internal policies and procedures for dealing with extreme for the population they are serving (i.e. school boards, and day care providers). Community agencies and partners that would like direct notification from the health unit in the event of an extreme cold alert should contact the Health Unit's Communications Supervisor at 705-743-1000, ext. 391.

-30-

For further information, please contact:

Shawn Telford-Eaton
Public Health Inspector
(705) 743-1000, ext. 287