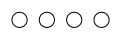




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BLACKSTONE VALLEY PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

MONTHLY HEALTH TIPS

January/February 2026



Winter Weather Is Here

Cold air has settled in, and with it comes an increased risk of home fires and carbon monoxide incidents as people rely on supplemental heating to stay warm. Keep these important heating safety tips in mind to stay both warm and safe this winter. Keep reading to learn more about programs that may help with rising heating bills.



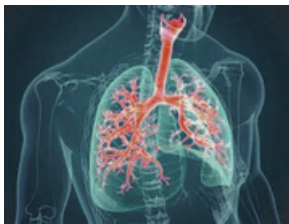
Cold Weather's Affect on Your Body

Being out in the cold for too long can affect your heart and brain, along with other vital organs. Studies have shown that hospitalizations for heart attacks rise after periods of cold weather.



Cardiovascular Affects

When air temperatures drop, blood vessels constrict to stop heat loss and to keep more blood around core organs. (This is why your fingers and toes get cold!) But this increases blood pressure which can lead to a heart attack or stroke, especially in people who are already at risk.



Respiratory Affects

Cold, dry air irritates the airways which can lead to inflammation and cause the muscles around the airways to constrict. This leads to wheezing, coughing, or shortness of breath. This is especially risky for those with asthma, chronic lung diseases, or other respiratory conditions.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia, which happens when the body's internal temperature drops below 95 degrees, is **not only caused by extreme cold** but can also occur if the body gets chilled from rain, sweat, or being in cold water. If the body is not warmed, the brain will stop working properly.

Warning Signs

- Shivering
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Slowed breathing
- Memory loss
- Drowsiness
- Puffy face with pale skin



<https://www.northbridgemass.org/board-of-health/pages/blackstone-valley-partnership-for-public-health-bvpph>



508-234-3272



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Prevent Fires: Heat Your Home Safely

More home fires occur during the winter months than during any other part of the year. Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires in the United States.

Take these steps to stay warm safely:

- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves.
- Plug space heaters directly into a wall outlet—never into an extension cord or power strip.
- Always turn off space heaters when you leave the room or go to bed.
- Have your furnace and chimney inspected and cleaned annually.
- Ensure your home has working smoke and CO alarms on every level and near sleeping areas.
- Never use ovens or grills to heat your home.



Electric Blankets and Heating Pads

Heating pads and electric blankets cause almost 500 fires each year. Almost all of these fires involve electric blankets that are more than ten years old.

There are two types of personal heating appliances, *heating pads* that are placed directly on the mattress and *electric blankets*. They are not meant to be used interchangeably or at the same time.

Safety Tips:

- Look for dark, charred, or frayed spots or one where the electric cord is cracked or frayed. Replace any worn or old heating pad or electric blanket.
- Do not allow anything on top of a heating pad or electric blanket when it is in use. When covered by anything, including other blankets or pets, electric blankets may overheat.
- Never fold electric blankets when in use. Folded or tucked in blankets could overheat and cause a fire.

Tips for Saving Energy

- Turn down the heat to 68°F or as low as comfortable. When you are asleep or away from home, turn it down by 7- 10 degrees for eight hours
- Caulk and weatherstrip doors and windows
- Have your oil-fired heating system serviced annually or your gas-fired heating system serviced every three years.
- Clean or replace furnace filters every other month.
- Keep the fireplace flue damper closed unless a fire is burning.
- Check that warm-air registers, baseboard heaters and radiators are not blocked by furniture or drapes.
- Close your curtains and shades at night; open them during the day



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Energy/Fuel Assistance

Commonly known as “fuel assistance,” the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a federal program that may be able to help pay some winter home heating bills. Eligibility is based on household income, family size and annual heat consumption.



Applications for this program must be submitted **before April 30, 2026**. To apply, begin collecting documents such as proof of income, household member information, the active lease or mortgage statement, heating bills, etc. You may begin the application process by following one of the links below.



SCAN HERE
to Apply

<https://toapply.org/SMOC>

The South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Inc. may also be contacted by phone at (508) 620-1230.



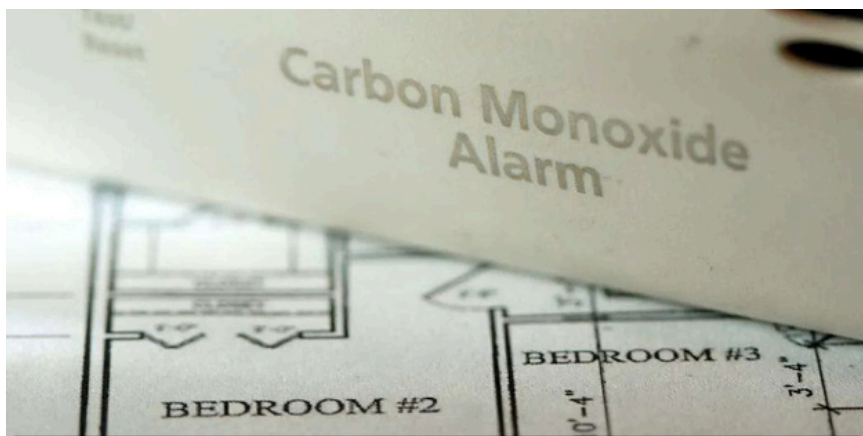
****Douglas Residents****

SCAN HERE
to Apply

<https://www.toapply.org/WCAC>

The Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. may also be contacted by phone at (508) 754-1176.

If you find that you need some assistance with your application, schedule time with Jenna Gouin at your local library or visit your local senior center. Help is available!



Carbon Monoxide: Silent Killer

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that kills without warning. It takes the lives of hundreds of people every year and sickens thousands more.

Take these steps to stay safe:

- Make sure there is a CO detector in every bedroom.
- Test your carbon monoxide detectors MONTHLY to ensure they're working! Set a reminder on your phone so you won't forget!
- Clear any snow or ice from the exterior vents on your home – including furnace, water heater, and dryer exhaust vents. Blocked vents can prevent proper exhaust of dangerous carbon monoxide gas, leading to a potentially deadly buildup inside your home. It can also cause your heating system to shut down unexpectedly. Keep at least a 3-foot clearance around vents.

Carbon Monoxide Prevention

