



For Immediate Release:

December 1, 2011

Air Quality, Cold Weather, Food Safety Tips

Power outages due to wind storms may cause concern over carbon monoxide poisoning, food borne illness

LOS ANGELES – The recent wind storms throughout Southern California have caused several issues such as power outages, loss of heating capabilities and refrigeration, and air quality concerns. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health would like to remind residents to take precautions against carbon monoxide poisoning, food borne illness and other health concerns.

Air Quality:

Strong winds have churned up dust and other debris in the air. People with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory conditions should minimize outdoor activities. Schools that have students with sensitive conditions, including heart disease, asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases, should not participate in PE or outdoor physical activity and should stay indoors as much as possible. Residents who are concerned about their respiratory condition should contact their doctor or health care provider for more specific recommendations.

Cold Weather:

“We want to remind people not to use stoves, barbecues or ovens to heat their homes due to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “There are places where people can go to stay warm, such as shelters or other public facilities. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable during cold snaps and precautions should be taken to ensure they don’t get too cold when they are outside.”

Take precautions to protect yourself from the cold:

- Dress in layers of warm clothing if you plan to be outdoors.
- Protect extremities from the cold by wearing a hat, scarf, gloves, and socks.
- Offer to help those in your neighborhood with limited access to heat, such as seniors or those who are ill. Check on them frequently.
- If you use an outdoor generator, place it as far away from the home as possible.
- Stoves, barbecues and ovens can produce a deadly gas known as carbon monoxide when used to heat a home. Never use these appliances in place of approved heaters such as electric, natural gas, or fireplaces. Install a carbon monoxide detector in your home to reduce the risk of poisoning.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include shortness of breath, headaches, muscle and joint pain, and nausea. Exposure to high levels of carbon monoxide could lead to death within minutes. Those suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning should be taken outside, into fresh air, immediately, and should be taken to an emergency room for immediate medical treatment.



A Winter Shelter Program is available for seniors and those looking for a place to stay warm. Locations and transportation information can be found on the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's website at: http://www.lahsa.org/year_round_shelter.asp, or by calling the LA County Information line at 2-1-1 from any landline or cell phone. For the deaf and hearing disabled, call the TDD line at 1-800-660-4026.

Food Safety:

Following a power outage, steps should be taken to determine which food from the refrigerator or freezer is safe to keep or must be discarded. Follow these recommendations to avoid foodborne illness.

- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe as long as the power outage is short. Food can be held in the fridge for a few hours if, while the power is out, the doors to the fridge and freezer are kept closed to maintain coldest possible temperatures.
- If a power outage lasts several hours, it is best to throw away perishable food items such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Items that have defrosted in the freezer should be thrown away. Do not re-freeze thawed food.
- All other food items should be inspected to ensure safety. If in doubt, throw it out.

Other safe clean-up tips:

- Residents should wear sturdy shoes and gloves for protection while cleaning or handling debris. Face masks are not necessary. If a job appears too big, hire a professional service.
- Avoid downed power lines.
- Damage to county facilities and roadways, and sanitation issues, such as a break in a sewer line, should be reported to the LA County Department of Public Works at (800) 675-HELP (675-4357) or by visiting their website at <http://www.dpw.lacounty.gov>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

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