



Cold Emergency Alert Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a Cold Emergency Alert?

A: A Cold Emergency Alert is called when the temperature falls, or is forecasted to fall, to 15°F or below including wind chill, or 20°F, including wind chill, and one or more of the following conditions exists:

- Steady precipitation for 60 consecutive minutes
- Snow accumulation of 3 inches or more
- Other meteorological conditions or threats as determined by Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA)

Q: Who activates the Cold Emergency Alert?

A: HSEMA activates the emergency. HSEMA makes the determination in consultation with several agencies including the Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), and Department of Health (DOH).

Q: How do I know a Cold Emergency Alert has been activated?

A: The public is notified via the AlertDC system by email, text and online notifications. Register online at hsema.dc.gov/page/alertdc or text "DC" to 411911. Cold Emergency information is also shared via [@DCHypothermia](https://twitter.com/DCHypothermia) and [@DC_HSEMA](https://twitter.com/DC_HSEMA) and online at dhs.dc.gov.

Q: What happens when there is a Cold Emergency Alert?

A: Under a Cold Emergency, additional services and supports are put in place to protect residents who are homeless beyond what is provided during a Hypothermia Alert by the Interagency Council on Homelessness [Winter Plan](http://ich.dc.gov/node/891182) (<http://ich.dc.gov/node/891182>). These additional measures are put in place to protect residents who are homeless from illness, injury, and death.

Q: Are there special provisions for homeless residents?

A: Yes. Various measures may be put in place during a Cold Emergency depending on the weather conditions and needs. The key provisions for homeless residents during the Cold Emergency are:

Shelter Access. Year Round, Seasonal, Hypothermia, and Overflow shelters are generally open from 7:00 pm until 7:00 am. During a Hypothermia or Cold Emergency Alert, year-round shelters will remain open 24 hours a day. Seasonal, Hypothermia, and Overflow shelters may be open during daytime hours if no conflicts exist with the regular daytime business operations of the facility.

Overnight Warming Sites. In the event the DC government shuts down due to inclement weather, government facilities typically open for public use will be closed. In order to provide access to a warm and safe facility, designated public buildings, such as recreation centers, may open during the day or overnight. In cases where homeless residents choose not to use the traditional or hypothermia shelters, these warming sites are low-barrier places to spend the night and stay warm. Sites will provide space for some belongings (one large bag), snacks, and toilet facilities. Individuals may access these sites on their own or by contacting the Shelter Hotline and being transported there by outreach teams.

Involuntary Transport. Every effort will be made by homeless outreach teams to secure an individual's cooperation with voluntary transport to a warm and safe setting. If an individual refuses to go inside, the Department of Behavioral Health and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) are fully prepared to exercise authority under DC law to transport those homeless individuals with a mental illness who are not able to protect themselves from the extreme cold to the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) or to other local emergency departments for emergency physical and mental health evaluation.

Q: How do I assist homeless residents during a Cold Emergency?

A: To request transport to a shelter or warming site for DC residents who are homeless and on the street now, providers and the public may contact the Shelter Hotline. Include the time when the reporter saw the person, the address or location of the sighting, a description of the person's appearance and name if known.

- uposh@upo.org
- (202) 399-7093
- 211 (or 311)
- 1-800-535-7252 (for toll-free calls from a pay phone)

Q: Are there any special provisions for pets?

A: Pets should be brought indoors during hypothermia alerts and extreme cold weather. To report cruelty, neglect, and animal emergencies 24 hours a day, call the Washington Humane Society at (202) 723-5730.