

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Executive Office of the Mayor



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
- Ice Storms and/or freezing rain
- Snow accumulation of 3 inches or more
- Sustained winds of more than 10-15 miles per hour
- A wind chill below 0°F
- Other meteorological conditions or threats as determined by HSEMA

Q: Who activates the Cold Emergency Alert?

A: Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) activates the emergency. HSEMA makes the determination with several agencies including the Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Health, and the Department of Human Services.

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

A: HSEMA notifies the public via the Alert DC system. Register by texting "DC" to 411911 or online at <https://textalert.ema.dc.gov/register.php>. Cold Emergency information is also shared via [@DCHypothermia](#), [@DC HSEMA](#), [@mayorvincegray](#) and on hsema.dc.gov and snow.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 homeless residents beyond what is provided by the Interagency Council on Homelessness [Winter Plan](#) during a Hypothermia Alert. These additional measures are put in place to ensure all residents, workers and visitors are protected from extreme cold weather to prevent 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.

Emergency Warming Shelters. 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.

Warming Buses. At designated times, Warming buses will be located throughout the city as a low-barrier place to spend the night and stay warm in cases where homeless residents choose not to use the traditional or hypothermia shelters. These buses will provide space for some belongings (one large bag), snacks, and outdoor toilet facilities. Individuals may access these buses 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 client's cooperation with voluntary transport to a warm and safe setting. If an individual refuses to go inside, the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) are fully prepared to exercise authority under D.C. 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 support for DC residents who are homeless and on the street now, providers and the public may contact the Shelter Hotline:

- 1-800-535-7252
- 202-399-7093
- 311 or 211
- Email the Shelter Hotline at uposh@upo.org. 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.

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.