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Riverside Health Officials urge residents to protect themselves against cold

With nighttime temperatures continuing to be forecast near or below freezing throughout the region, Riverside County health officials are urging residents to take steps to protect themselves from the cold.

Officials are reminding residents to take precautions as they head out into the cold for errands and be prepared when traveling on mountain or remote roads that can be slick from the icy conditions.

“Exposure to freezing temperatures is not something to be taken lightly,” said Susan Harrington, director of the Riverside County Department of Public Health. “Some people go out into the cold believing it will be for a short period then find themselves in trouble.”

Animals can also be impacted by the cold temperatures and officials urge residents to bring their pets inside and never leave them unattended in a vehicle. For more tips for care of animals in the cold, see <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/pet-care-tips/cold-weather-tips.aspx>

Health officials say those at the greatest risk of hypothermia and other serious health problems are people who work outside, seniors, infants and people with chronic conditions.

The warning signs of hypothermia are shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness. For infants, the warning signs are bright red, cold skin and very low energy. If you notice any of these signs, take the person’s temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, seek medical attention immediately and get the individual to a warm room or shelter.

Officials recommend drinking warm fluids, keeping homes warm, wearing several thin layers of clothing, bringing pets inside and avoiding alcoholic or caffeinated beverages because they cause the body to lose heat rapidly. Use space heaters and fireplaces appropriately to avoid household fires and the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The Community Action Partnership of Riverside provides access to a utility assistance and home weatherization program. For more information, please go to <http://www.capriverside.org/opencms/programs/weatherization.html> or call 951-955-4900.

If you need to drive in the cold, keep extra clothing and blankets in the vehicle and carry chains if traveling on mountain roads.