

2024 VCH Winter Health Resource for Community Organizations

This content and health guidance is intended for non-governmental organizations supporting their community during extreme weather events, and awareness for VCH staff working closely with these partners. Email us to sign up: seasonalreadiness@vch.ca

Who is VCH Seasonal Readiness?

These email notifications are sent from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Public Health (Priority Populations Team & Healthy Environments and Climate Change Team).

What does VCH Seasonal Readiness email me?

- Seasonal readiness webinars and engagement opportunities
- Pre-season messaging and updates
- Health guidance during extreme weather events. Currently extreme heat, cold, and wildfire smoke events, but the team is working to expand to guidance for other events, such as drought and flooding.

How does VCH Seasonal Readiness support community organizations?

- Connections to health services, such as mental health and substance use.
- Letters of supports for funding, programming, community planning.
- Health guidance for planning, response, and daily operations. E.g. infection control, water quality, climate change, emergency response for extreme weather events, harm reduction.
- Health training and presentations. E.g. Heat check-ins, seasonal readiness, and naloxone training.
- Community projects to learn how environmental hazards impact community. E.g. air quality monitoring and engaging people with lived experience.
- Please email seasonalreadiness@vch.ca to discuss how we can support your work.

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Sign Up for Weather Notifications

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is the official Canadian weather service used by health authorities, government, and emergency management professionals.

- ECCC sometimes provides **early warning email notifications** for organizations involved in emergency response. Email MeteoPac@ec.gc.ca to sign up. Ensure you also sign up for public weather notifications below.
- Sign up for [EC Alert Me](#) for ECCC **public weather alerts by email**. Select the communities and weather events you would like to be notified about.
- Download the [WeatherCAN](#) app for ECCC **public weather alerts on your cell phone** (including air quality alerts from Metro Vancouver and Smokie Skies Bulletin). Select the communities you would like to be notified about.
- Check out the Environment and Climate Change Canada [Wind Chill Index](#).

Follow Verified Emergency Information

- EmergencyInfoBC [website](#) and [@EmergencyInfoBC](#) on social media for provincial emergency events.
- Local government or First Nation's website, Facebook and sometimes X (formerly Twitter).
- [Local health authority](#) website and social media platforms.

Sign Up for Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Shelter Notifications

Check out the [BC Housing Shelters List](#) to see if there are [Extreme Weather Response shelters](#) in your community. If there are, sign up to be emailed when they are activated. Within Metro Vancouver, contact Homelessness Services Association of BC at info@hsa-bc.ca. Outside of Metro Vancouver, contact BC Housing at [EWR BCH@bchousing.org](mailto:EWR_BCH@bchousing.org).

People at Higher Risk from Winter Weather

Anyone exposed to winter weather conditions can experience cold-related injuries, but some people are at higher risk for frostbite, hypothermia, and other impacts, including:

- People who are unhoused or insecurely housed
- People who use substances, including alcohol
- People spending long periods of time outdoors (e.g. for work, recreation, transportation)
- People living in housing without enough insulation, electricity, or heat (including energy poverty)
- People with a pre-existing health conditions, including disease of the heart, lungs, or conditions that impact blood circulation (e.g. diabetes or some medications that constrict blood vessels)
- Older adults, infants, and young children

Health Impacts from Winter Weather

Hypothermia

- VCH [Hypothermia Poster](#): How to identify and treat hypothermia
- VCH [Winter Webpage](#) (translations available)

Frostbite

- VCH [Frostbite Poster](#): How to identify and treat frostbite
- VCH [Winter Webpage](#) (translations available)

Slips and Falls

Everyone, regardless of age and ability, can be at risk for falls. Over the winter, emergency department visits or hospitalizations due to slips and falls increases. But falls are preventable with the right tools and preparation.

- VCH [Fall prevention Tips](#)
- VCH [Fall prevention programs and resources](#)
- FHA Video: [Tips for walking outside](#)

Worsening Heart and Lung Conditions

Cold weather can worsen symptoms of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and angina. It may also increase the risk of heart attack or stroke. People with these health conditions are advised to check in with their healthcare provider before the season, have medications on hand, and take it easy when out in the cold weather. **Call 9-1-1 for anyone experiencing emergency symptoms**, like trouble breathing or catching their breath, [signs of a heart attack, unstable angina](#), or [signs of stroke](#)

Mental Health and Substance Use

For many, winter can take a toll on physical and mental health and well-being. [Research also suggests](#) cold weather may increase the risk of toxic drug overdoses. Supports include:

- VCH [Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
- VCH [Harm Reduction](#)
- VCH [Overdose prevention sites](#)
- VCH [Toxic Drugs: Ideas to Stay Alive](#)
- Towards the Heart [Getting Prescriptions and Carries During Extreme Weather](#)

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can happen when appliances malfunction or are used in spaces without adequate ventilation (e.g. blocked chimney, closed windows or inside a tent or vehicle). You cannot see, smell or taste carbon monoxide but it can be deadly in minutes. Share the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and prevention tips:

- [Unsafe heating sources for indoor or enclosed spaces](#) (graphic)
- [Common sources of carbon monoxide poisoning](#) (graphic)
- [Common CO myths and facts from Ontario fire fighters](#) (17 min video, start at 51:35).
- [PreparedBC CO social media toolkit](#) (brochures, news release templates, door hangers, graphics, posts, etc.).

Supportive Community Level Actions

*We understand these actions may not be feasible for every organization or may be done in partnership with local governments, First Nations, or other organizations. These are example actions that could be done as funding and capacity allows. Please email [VCH Seasonal Readiness](#) to discuss how we can support you in this work (see page 1 examples).

Actions **BEFORE** a Winter Weather Event:

- Learn about [winter weather hazards in your area](#) and [sign up for weather notifications](#) (page 2).
- Revise or create a winter weather response plan, with actions like education, [outreach to high-risk community members](#), providing a warming space, hot food/ drinks, transportation to shelter, etc.
- Update other winter-related plans, such as business continuity plans. Will programs be cancelled during weather events? How will staff and community be notified so they do not attempt to travel in winter conditions?
- Consider operating an [Extreme Weather Response shelter](#) (often done in partnership, see page 5).
- Prepare for winter response: coordinate with partners, identify high risk community members, gather equipment, print information materials, train staff and volunteers, etc.
- Encourage community members to [make a winter plan](#), find a winter weather buddy, and [learn how to prevent winter health risks](#) like hypothermia, frostbite, carbon monoxide poisoning, and falls (see page 3).
- For community members who are unhoused or inadequately housed, begin handing out and posting information about warming spaces, shelters, hot food, and drinks. Consider preparing and distributing maps of winter services ([City of Vancouver](#), and [North Shore Homelessness Task Force](#) already have maps).
- Share community needs you may be hearing with local governments and other partners. E.g. Additional shelters/ warming centres, cultural or other needs in these spaces, winter equipment, transportation, etc. [VCH Seasonal Readiness](#) is also happy to amplify these requests.

Actions **DURING** a Winter Weather Event:

- Activate winter response plans. Notify staff, and ensure frontline staff are aware of shelters and other resources.
- Seek out opportunities to participate in community emergency coordination calls for situational updates. If you are not sure if your community has one, please reach out and [VCH Seasonal Readiness](#) can help find out.
- Increase community messaging. Consider sharing:
 - Updates and messaging from government, First Nations, and health (page 2).
 - Dangers of being exposed to even mildly cold weather and [prevention tips for hypothermia/ frostbite](#).
 - Locations of shelters, warming spaces, and hot food/ drink.
 - Encourage community to check on neighbours, friends and family, especially older adults or people with disabilities who live alone. Are they keeping warm? Homes should be at least 21°C if infants or older adults are present. Do they need supplies, transportation, assistance clearing snow or other supports?
 - Available winter health services, including mental health and harm reduction (page 2).
- Conduct outreach to high-risk community members, especially those who are unhoused or inadequately housed. Provide warming supplies (e.g. hats, mitts, socks, hand warmers, snacks, Vaseline, etc). Help them access warming spaces, centres or shelters.

Additional Winter Resources:

- VCH [Extreme Cold Webpage](#) with resources for the public and community organizations (translated).
- Prepared BC [Severe Winter Weather and Storm Preparedness Guide](#): How to plan for winter weather (translations available). Email PREPAREDBC@gov.bc.ca to request free printed guides for your programs.
- National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health [Extreme Cold webpage](#).
- Towards the Heart [Prepare for Extreme Cold Weather: A Guide for Housing Service Providers](#)
- BCCDC [Public Health Recommendations to Reduce the Impacts of Exposure to Winter Weather on People Experiencing Homelessness in British Columbia](#).
- For community members having difficulty paying for heat, explore rebate and energy conservation options:
 - [Check if your city or town has a rent bank](#).
 - [CleanBC Income Qualified Program](#)
 - [Better Homes BC](#)

Cold Weather Shelter Options within the VCH Region

Information pulled from [BC Housing](#), [City of Vancouver](#) and other local government or First Nations shelter webpages. Please [email us](#) if you would like to provide a correction or updated information.

For the most up-to-date information: Check the [BC Housing shelter registry](#), [BC211](#), [Street Messenger](#) or call the shelter directly. The province/ EMCR hosts [EmergencyMapBC](#) but not all communities consistently update or add information.

Year-Round Shelters (permanent)

- Open year-round, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Provincially funded and run by NGOs

Temporary Shelters

- Temporarily open to supplement permanent shelters. Operated year-round, usually day and night.
- Some may be open for months, some for years, depending on funding and need.
- Usually funded by BC Housing in partnership with local government(s) or First Nations
- Examples: Powell River

Temporary Winter Shelters

- Generally open Nov 1 to April 30 and closed May 1 to October 31
- Usually open at night, 7pm -7am.
- Usually funded by BC Housing in partnership with local government(s), First Nations, NGOs or combinations.
- Examples: Gibsons

Extreme Weather Response (EWR)

- Only available Oct 15 to April 15.
- Only at night, hours vary
- Funded by BC Housing, space often donated by NGOs (sometimes local government or First Nations) and operated by NGOs (sometimes local government or First Nations).
- Thresholds set by community planning table (HSABC/ BCH, local gov, First Nations, operators, health reps etc). Not historically coordinated across communities or aligned with other shelter options, e.g. warming centres.
- To learn more about the EWR program, check out the [BC Housing EWR Webpage](#) (all of BC) and the [HSABC EWR Webpage](#) (some Metro Vancouver communities).

Warming Centres

- Usually daytime. Some extend overnight but do not provide mats/ beds (e.g. Vancouver). Some only open over night and essentially EWR but called “Warming Centre” (e.g. Richmond).
- Often provide warm drinks, food and sometimes referrals to other services
- Hosted by local governments, First Nations or NGOs
- Operated by local governments, First Nations, NGOs or a combination.
- Funding: Many streams (UBCM, split between local governments, EMCR)

Warming Spaces

- Publicly available spaces with heating rebranded as warming space, e.g. mall
- No services provided because not opened specifically for this use.

Scan of Cold Weather Services in the VCH Region

Community	Winter Shelters	Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Program	Warming Centre / Spaces
Brief scan completed November 2024. Shelter information may change quickly or be shared offline so this list may not be accurate. Check BC Housing shelter registry or BC211 for more up-to-date information. Always confirm availability directly with the shelter.			
<p>City of Richmond</p> <p>Community Cold Weather Info</p>	<p>Year-round shelter: Richmond House Emergency Shelter, operated by the Salvation Army. 12040 Horseshoe Way. 55 beds. 604-276-2490 Shelter Info</p> <p>Temporary Winter Shelters Operated by The Progressive Housing Society.</p> <p>South Arm Outdoor Pool Building, 10100 South Arm Place. 20 beds. 604-374-9876</p> <p>Brighthouse Pavilion, 7840 Granville Ave. 15 beds. 604-374-1474</p>	<p>As of November 21, 2024 media and community organizations are reporting no EWR shelters are currently available for winter 2024-2025.</p>	<p>Brighthouse Pavilion drop-in centre, shower, and laundry program, operated by Turning Point Recovery Society. 7840 Granville Ave. 2024/2025 winter hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: 8am to 4pm. Tuesday: 8am to 3pm. Lunch is served from 12 to 1 pm, Monday to Friday. 604-644-1418</p>
<p>City of Vancouver</p> <p>Community Cold Weather Info</p>	<p>Many shelters and different operators.</p> <p>Check City of Vancouver list of Shelter Beds in Vancouver</p>	<p>For 2024/2025 winter there are currently 9 EWRs planned.</p> <p>Check City of Vancouver list of Shelter Beds in Vancouver</p> <p>EWR activated when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • temperatures near zero with rainfall that makes it difficult or impossible for those experiencing homelessness to remain dry • Sleet or freezing rain • Snow accumulation • Sustained high winds • Temperatures at or below 0°C, or "feels like" 0°C with wind chill • Rainfall of at least 50mm in a 24-hour period 	<p>In Vancouver, warming centres are activated as a life-saving measure when the temperature reaches -4°C or below (or it feels like -4°C or below). See the City of Vancouver map below for shelters, warming centres and daytime service centres.</p> <p>2024-2025 City of Vancouver map of winter shelters and warming centres</p>
<p>Musqueam Nation</p> <p>Nation Emergency Info</p>			

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<p>North Shore Emergency Management (NSEM): is the emergency management department for the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, and District of West Vancouver.</p>			
<p>North Shore Emergency Management Community Cold Weather Info</p> <p>City of North Vancouver Community Cold Weather Info</p> <p>District of North Vancouver Community Cold Weather Info</p> <p>District of West Vancouver Community Cold Weather Info</p>	<p>Year-round shelter operated by Lookout Housing, 705 2nd Street West, North Vancouver. 45 beds.</p> <p>Shelter info</p>	<p>North Shore Neighbourhood House EWR Shelter, operated by Lookout and located 705 W 2nd St, North Vancouver. 20 beds. 604-982-9126. EWR info.</p> <p>St Andrew’s United Church EWR, located 1044 St Georges Ave. 20 beds. 604-319-2809. EWR Info.</p> <p>EWR activated when: temperatures below -2 Celsius, significant snow, freezing rain, sustained high wind, and/or temperatures near zero with rain</p> <p>During the January 2024 cold event the City of North Vancouver opened an overnight warming centre at John Braithwaite Community Centre, 145 W 1st St. 604-983-6471.</p>	<p>North Shore Homelessness Task Force has a resource map and list and a Keeping Safe resource card with available services on the North Shore (e.g. shower programs, meals, drop in spaces). Last update 2022.</p> <p>Daytime warming spaces: West Van Memorial Library, West Van Community Centre, Gleneagles Community Centre, West Van Seniors Activity Centre (695 21st St), all North Van recreation and community centres, all District of North Vancouver Libraries. Extended hours at North Vancouver City Library (9am-9pm).</p>
<p>Squamish Nation Nation Emergency Info</p>			
<p>Tsleil-Waututh Nation Nation Website</p>			
<p>Bowen Island Community Cold Weather Info</p>			
<p>Lions Bay Community Emergency Info</p>			

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Sea-to-Sky Corridor			Sea to Sky Community Services runs a homeless prevention and outreach program down the sea-to-sky corridor.
District of Squamish Community Cold Weather Info	Year-round shelter operated by Helping Hands Society. 37871 Third Avenue. 16 beds. 604-815-4984. Shelter info	Year-round shelter expands into an EWR. Operated by Squamish Helping Hands Society. 10 Beds. 604-390-3000. EWR Info	Warming centres sometimes activated for severe storms/ power outages. Monitor District of Squamish Facebook for activation and hours.
Resort Municipality of Whistler Community Cold Weather Info		EWR run by Whistler Community Services Society. 8000 Nesters Road. 18 beds. 6pm – 8am nightly when conditions are met. EWR Info Activated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temperatures -10 °C or below, OR • Temperatures 0 °C WITH adverse weather (snowfall, heavy rainfall, blizzard, etc.) 	Warming centre sometimes at the library for power outages or cold weather warnings. Otherwise promoted as a warming space during regular hours. Monitor Resort Municipality of Whistler Facebook Page for activation and hours.
Village of Pemberton Community Emergency Info			
Lil'wat Nation Nation Website			
Samahquam Nation Nation Website			
Skatin Nations Nation Website			
N'Quatqua Nation Nation Website			
Xa'xtsa (Douglas First Nation) Nation Website			
Squamish- Lillooet Regional District General Emergency Info	Temporary Shelter operated by Lillooet Friendship Centre Society. 15 beds. 250-256-8852. Shelter Info.		

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Sunshine Coast Emergency Program (SCEP): Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, shíshálh Nation Government District, and Sunshine Coast Regional District joint integrated emergency program. See website for more information on the SCEP and see below for community specific winter resources.			
Sunshine Coast Regional District Community Emergency Info			
Town of Gibsons General Cold Weather Info	Temporary winter shelter at 682 Gibsons Way, operated by the Salvation Army. Open nightly, 7pm-7am, Oct 17- April 15. Overnight phone 6pm-8am: 604-886-3467 10 beds. Shelter Info		Sometimes open warming centres but otherwise promote warming spaces. Monitor Gibsons Facebook Page and website for availability during winter 2024/ 2025 cold events. January 2024 Cold Event: Warm spaces were available regular hours: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gibsons and Area Community Centre • Gibsons Public Library • Sunnycrest Mall • Gibsons Public Market
shíshálh Nation Nation website			Winter 2023/24: shíshálh community members were welcome to warm up at the Community Member Services building (5559 Sunshine Coast Highway) during office hours (Mon-Fri, 8:30 am- 4:30 pm). Note: Nation offices were closed Dec 21 to Jan 2, 2024. Call 604-885-9404 for more information. For 2024/ 2025 updates, Nation members can follow the shíshálh Nation Members facebook group and general public can follow shíshálh Nation's facebook .

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District of Sechelt General Cold Weather Info	Year-round shelter (35 beds) and temporary winter shelter (10 beds) operated by Raincity Housing. 5653 Wharf Street. 604-740-8160. Shelter Info		Does not seem to open warming centres but promotes warming spaces on their facebook page. January 2024 Cold Event: Advertised warm spaces available during regular opening hours. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sechelt Aquatic Centre reception area • Sechelt Public Library • Trail Bay Centre Mall
qathet region: qathet Regional District coordinates emergency planning, preparedness, training, response, and recovery for all areas within the Regional District, including the City of Powell River and Tla'amin Nation.			
Qathet Regional District Extreme Cold webpage			
City of Powell River General Cold Weather Info	Temporary shelter, operated by Lift Community Services. 4746 Joyce Ave. 20 beds . 604-578-0633. Shelter Info		
Tla'amin Nation Nation Website			

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<p>Central Coast Regional District</p> <p>(including Bella Coola)</p> <p>General Emergency Info</p>			<p>Winter 2023/ 2024: Bella Coola library listed as a warm space on CCRD facebook and Vancouver Island Regional Library website.</p> <p>Follow Central Coast Regional District Facebook page for updates.</p>
<p>Nuxalk Nation</p> <p>Nation Emergency Info</p>			<p>Emergency alerts and local resources may be shared on Nuxalk Nation EOC Information facebook.</p>
<p>Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation</p> <p>Nation Website</p>			
<p>Wuikinuxv Nation</p> <p>Nation website</p>			
<p>Heiltsuk Nation (Bella Bella)</p> <p>Nation Emergency Info</p>			<p>Warming centre seems to be for one-off emergencies, like power outages. Updates may be shared on Heiltsuk & Denny Island Emergency Response facebook page.</p>