

Blizzards, freezing rain, and ice storms

Overview

Blizzards, ice storms, high winds and blowing snow can develop quickly and threaten life and property. Severe storms occur frequently across Alberta and can be unpredictable when they happen outside of their regular season.

Be prepared

Individuals and families should be prepared to take care of themselves for at least 72 hours. The following steps will assist you in building your preparedness plan.

- **Know the risks:** Knowing the risks and hazards can help you and your loved ones prepare for the unexpected.
- **Make a plan:** A plan will help you cope with the stress of an emergency or disaster.
- **Build a kit:** By taking a few simple steps you can become better prepared to face a range of emergencies. Be sure your kit includes a battery-powered/crank radio/flashlight or [Weatheradio](#) in case of a power outage.

Find out where your community will post information and updates during an emergency, and make sure to download the [Alberta Emergency Alert](#) app for critical, life-saving alerts.

When individuals are prepared to the best of their ability, this allows first responders, such as police, fire, and ambulance, to focus on the emergency and provide assistance to those who need the help most.

Blizzards and blowing snow

A [blizzard warning](#) is issued when falling or blowing snow, combined with 40 km/h winds, is expected for 4 hours or longer. Visibility is usually reduced to 400 metres or less.

A [blowing snow advisory](#) is issued when blowing snow combined with 30 km/h winds are expected for 3 hours or longer and visibility is reduced to 800 metres or less.

Blizzard facts

- Blizzards can occur when there are clear skies.
- In wide open areas, blowing snow or a blizzard can mean zero visibility!

Blizzard survival tips

- If you live in a rural area and a blizzard or blowing snow is forecast, you may want to string a guideline between your house and any other buildings you might have to go to during the storm.
- Restrict travel to daytime hours and let someone know your route and arrival time.

If you find yourself stuck in a vehicle during a severe storm, remain calm! Stay inside the vehicle, run the engine every once in a while, and beware of fumes. Ensure the exhaust pipe is not blocked, and continually allow fresh air in.

Freezing rain and ice storms

Freezing rain is rain that falls through a layer of warm air into a layer of freezing cold air below (below 0°C), freezing onto any surfaces or objects in the cold air and creating a buildup of what is called “glaze ice” on everything it touches.

An **ice storm** occurs when large amounts of freezing rain continue for several hours. They can also include wind, ice fog, and cold temperatures.

Freezing rain and ice storm facts

- Freezing rain can cause damage by creating a heavy load wherever the ice forms. During an ice storm, freezing rain damage can be severe.
- Even a small amount of freezing rain can make roads extremely slippery.
- Ice from freezing rain can build-up on any surface making sidewalks and pathways dangerous for falls and slips.
- In an ice storm, the risks from freezing rain may still be present hours or even days after the rain stops falling.

Freezing rain and ice storm survival tips

- Avoid driving when freezing rain is forecast.
- Wait several hours after the storm ends so that road crews have enough time to address poor road conditions.
- If possible, avoid going outdoors. If it's unavoidable, use extreme caution.

Pay attention to wires, large sheets of ice on buildings, tree branches, or power lines above you that could break or fall without warning.

- Never touch a power line – you could be electrocuted.

Extreme cold

In Alberta, an [extreme cold warning](#) is issued for expectations of air temperature minus 40°C or colder, or the [wind chill index](#) is minus 40°C or colder.

Extreme cold facts

- Temperatures this low could occur throughout the winter months, especially from early December to late February.
- Extreme cold may occur with other weather, such as blizzards, ice storms or ice fog, and pose a risk of hypothermia or frostbite.
- Ice fog can occur in temperatures lower than minus 30°C due to tiny ice particles in the air. Ice fog forms quickly and can reduce visibility to near zero.

Extreme cold survival tips

- During extreme cold, stay indoors, and try to stay warm.
- If you must go outside, wear proper clothing, and take care not to overexert yourself.

Financial preparedness

- Speak to an insurance agent about your specific needs.
- Know your insurance policy. Make sure your home, vehicle, business and belongings are protected.
- If possible, consider an emergency savings account to cover temporary expenses while you are out of your home.
- If you can, keep emergency cash handy in case banking services are unavailable.
- If you are evacuated, keep all receipts for additional expenses.
- Prepare a [detailed list](#) of all your belongings.
- Know the [7 steps](#) for making a home insurance claim.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada is ready to answer your questions. Connect with them by email at askibcwest@ibc.ca or by telephone 1-844-227-5422. For more information on insurance preparedness visit ibc.ca.

For more information

Read our other fact sheets on:

- Severe weather
- Tornadoes
- Thunderstorms, lightning, and hail

You can find more information about preparedness through Alberta.ca, or and [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#).