



# Monmouth County Regional Health Commission

Winter 2012

## Tips for Weathering the Winter

- Consider using **non-toxic de-icing substances** such as clean clay cat litter, sand, or fireplace/stove ash to prevent hazardous waste from chemicals. Chemical de-icers can be hazardous to your pets, your trees and shrubs, and the environment. Antifreeze that leaks from car engines and chemical snow melters on driveways, roads, and runways can pollute surface water and groundwater through the soil.
- **Winterize your vehicle** by checking your air filter and fluid levels, checking tires for tread wear and proper inflation, and checking the condition of your windshield wipers. Ensuring your vehicle is ready for weather changes will reduce damage, and will keep you safe on the road.
- If you have a wood-burning fireplace, **save your ashes** in a tin instead of throwing them away. Cold wood ashes can be mixed in your compost heap to create a valuable soil amendment that provides nutrients to your garden.
- **Use electric snow removal products** rather than gasoline-powered ones. While electric products consume energy, they do not emit greenhouse gases. As alternatives, use snow shovels, ice crackers, and brooms to clear snow from your sidewalk, porch, or driveway.
- If you have a manual thermostat or no thermostat at all, one way to save energy and money this winter is to **install an ENERGY STAR qualified programmable thermostat**. When installed and used with the four pre-programmed temperature settings for weekend and weekdays, you can save about \$100 each year while staying comfortable. Before leaving for vacation, **turn down your thermostat** (or use a programmable one) so that you don't waste natural resources by generating unneeded heat. You can also buy outdoor and indoor lights with timers so that lights don't stay on all night.
- Winter storms often cause power outages. Prevent waste by keeping **rechargeable batteries** rather than disposable ones stored throughout your house with your flashlights. If you do use disposable batteries, prevent hazardous waste by buying batteries with low mercury content.



## NJ Supplemental Nutrition Program

*NJ SNAP* is the new name for the nutrition assistance program to help low-income individuals and families buy the groceries needed to eat healthy.

### Who is Eligible?

- Low-income working families and individuals.
- Individuals who just lost their unemployment benefits

- Unemployed or part-time workers ;seniors and people with disabilities and/or living on low or fixed incomes.

### Did You Know?

- You might be eligible for *NJ SNAP* even if you own your home, have money in the bank, have a job, or own a car.
- To be eligible for *NJ SNAP*, a

single person can have gross-monthly income of \$1,670. Two people can have gross monthly-income of \$2,247.

If you are eligible for *NJ SNAP*, you may also qualify for heating assistance through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) . For more info visit [www.njsnap.org](http://www.njsnap.org)

# Preventing Unintentional Medication Poisonings

Children can get into medications they find around their home and the homes of friends and relatives. Medications are easily accessible because most people leave them on top of kitchen countertops, night stands, dressers, and in unlocked medicine cabinets and pocketbooks.

Here's some safety tips to prevent unintentional pediatric medication poisonings:

- Remove all prescription and over-the-counter medicines from accessible medicine cabinets and other storage areas
- (bedside stands, kitchen cabinets, etc.) and LOCK THEM UP.
- When friends and family visit, make sure all of their medications (prescription, non-prescription, herbal, vitamins and dietary supplements) are LOCKED UP.
- Child resistant caps are effective only if used correctly. Be sure to replace caps tightly after using a medication.
- Make sure to properly discard medicines that are not being used. Check expiration dates frequently on all over-the-counter and prescription medications kept in the home. Recent recommendations include combining expired or leftover medicines with used coffee grounds, or kitty litter. Place this in a coffee can with a lid, and discard with your household trash.
- Keep medicines (as well as vitamins and dietary supplements) in original containers to reduce the chance of mistaking one pill for another. Do this at home AND when traveling. It would be best to lock up all medications in a medication lockbox!

## Winter Traveling Tips

Here are some simple things you can do to take care of yourself and keep others well:

- Remember to travel only when you feel well.
- Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue. No tissue? Then cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.

## Keeping Families Safe Through the Holidays

Follow these easy safety tips to keep your loved ones safe during this exciting time of year:

- **Alcohol-** If accidentally swallowed by children and/or pets, leftover cocktails can be fatal! Always empty beverage glasses and place them out of reach of curious children and pets.
- **Candles-** Place candles in secure areas where they cannot fall or be knocked over by children and pets. Use non-flammable holders and remember that small amounts of melted wax can become a choking hazard to small children.
- **Holiday Plants-** Many plants can be potentially harmful if eaten or handled improperly so decorate for the holiday season using non-poisonous plants if possible. Holiday plants which can produce some toxic effects, (mainly gastrointestinal) include Jerusalem Cherry, Mistletoe, Boxwood and a variety of species of the Yew. Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not considered toxic when consumed in small amounts.
- **Tree Ornaments-** Ornaments resembling foods are as attractive as the real thing. A child or a dog may think a fake apple or cookie looks appetizing and attempt to eat it, so avoid using them for decoration.
- **Fire Salts-** Attractive when added to fires for the colorful flames they produce. These salts can produce serious stomach problems if ingested.

**Wrapping Paper- DO NOT burn in the fireplace.** It may contain toxic metals like lead, may burn at such a high temperature that it may prove dangerous to the fireplace, or flake and send sparks out into the room causing a potential fire.