

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Heart disease risks in cold weather**

Just as you bundle up to protect yourself against winter weather, take care to protect your heart, too. If you have heart disease, winter is the time to follow these tips.

First, get a flu shot. Every year in the United States, about 200,000 people are hospitalized due to complications from influenza (flu), according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). In severe cases, it can even lead to death. Studies have shown that death from the flu is more common among people with heart disease than any other chronic condition.

Heart patients are encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as flu shots are available. If you did not get one early in the season, you can still benefit by getting the shot as late as December or January. Flu season can last well into March.

Next, be careful about taking over-the-counter cold and flu medications if you have high blood pressure. Most over-the-counter cold and flu products have decongestants. Using decongestants may cause problems for people with heart disease, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, diabetes, or difficulty in urination due to an enlarged prostate gland. Common decongestants in over-the-counter drugs are pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine. If you have high blood pressure or other health issues, it is wise to talk to your doctor before taking medication. For more information on blood pressure and decongestants, go to <http://bit.ly/1ceTLLm> or [www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo).

And finally, don't overdo it with shoveling snow. Research shows that events like sudden cardiac arrest may increase during cold winter months. People who don't get regular physical activity should not risk their health by shoveling snow. Anyone who suffers cardiac arrest needs CPR immediately, or they're unlikely to survive more than 10 to 12 minutes. If you do not know CPR, call the American Red Cross, your local health department, or the American Heart Association to find out more about CPR classes in your community.

As temperatures drop, take time to care for your heart. Contact your local West Virginia University Extension Service county office and ask about health-related publications and programs.

WVU Extension Service's Love Your Heart Movement is adapted from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's campaign and is targeted to help West Virginians become educated and enabled to take charge of their own health.

To learn more about ways WVU Extension uses trusted research and local experts to empower citizens to improve their health, visit [www.ext.wvu.edu](http://www.ext.wvu.edu), or contact your local office of the WVU Extension Service.

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