

72-Hour Winter Preparedness Checklist

A practical household checklist for winter weather across the United States

How to use this guide: Start with the Core 72-Hour Checklist, then use the regional section that best matches where you live. Local conditions vary, so always follow current instructions from your local National Weather Service office and emergency management agency.

CORE 72-HOUR CHECKLIST — EVERY HOUSEHOLD

Water & Food

- Drinking water: target at least 1 gallon per person per day for 3 days when feasible.
- At least 3 days of nonperishable food; include foods that require little or no cooking.
- Manual can opener and basic utensils.
- Infant, dietary, and pet supplies as needed.
- Check expiration dates and rotate stored food and water.

Power, Heat & Light

- Flashlights or lanterns for each household area.
- Extra batteries and/or charged power banks.
- Backup power plan for critical loads such as refrigerator, freezer, communications, medical equipment, or heating equipment.
- Test backup batteries, generator equipment, transfer equipment, and cords before storm season.
- Carbon monoxide alarms installed/tested with backup batteries.
- Smoke alarms installed/tested with backup batteries.
- Safe plan for staying warm if normal heating is unavailable.
- Never use a generator, grill, camp stove, or fuel-burning appliance indoors or in an attached garage.

Communication & Information

- Sign up for local emergency alerts.
- NOAA Weather Radio or another reliable weather-alert method, with backup power.
- Fully charged phones and backup charging cables.
- Written list of important phone numbers and addresses.
- Family communication/meeting plan.

Home & Plumbing

- Know where the main water shutoff is located.
- Identify exposed or vulnerable pipes and protect them appropriately.
- Check doors/windows for drafts and weather-sealing problems.

- Keep basic tools available: adjustable wrench, screwdrivers, utility knife, tape, etc.
- Fire extinguisher accessible and in-date.
- Clear leaves/debris from drains and gutters where appropriate before major precipitation.

Health, Safety & Special Needs

- At least 3 days of essential medications and a plan for temperature-sensitive medications when applicable.
- First-aid kit.
- Warm clothing, blankets, gloves, hats, and sturdy footwear.
- Hygiene and sanitation supplies.
- Plan for children, older adults, pets, and anyone with mobility or medical needs.
- Check on neighbors who may need assistance, when safe to do so.

Vehicle

- Fuel level adequate for expected travel; avoid unnecessary travel during dangerous conditions.
- Tires, battery, fluids, lights, wipers, and heater checked.
- Ice scraper/snow brush.
- Blanket/warm clothing.
- Water and nonperishable snacks.
- Flashlight and spare batteries.
- Phone charger/power bank.
- Jumper cables and/or jump starter.
- Basic first-aid kit and emergency supplies.
- Follow local/state guidance on chains, traction devices, or winter tires where applicable.

REGIONAL WINTER CHECKLISTS

Use the section that best matches your location. If you live near a regional boundary, combine sections. These are hazard-oriented checklists, not forecasts.

Northeast & New England

- Snow/ice removal plan: shovel, ice scraper, traction material, and safe footwear.
- Prepare for nor'easters, heavy snow, freezing rain, strong winds, and extended outages.
- Protect pipes in exterior walls, crawlspaces, garages, and other vulnerable areas.
- Keep a way to safely heat a small occupied area if the primary system fails.
- If using a generator, plan its outdoor location before the storm and keep it away from doors, windows, and vents.

Mid-Atlantic & Appalachians

- Prepare for rapid changes between rain, sleet, freezing rain, and snow.
- Keep ice-melt/traction material and safe snow-removal tools available.
- Inspect trees/branches near structures and power lines where appropriate.
- Plan for power outages and travel disruptions even when snow totals are modest.
- Protect exposed plumbing during sharp freezes.

Southeast & Gulf Coast

- Prepare for sudden freezes, freezing rain/ice, and cold-weather power outages.
- Insulate/protect vulnerable pipes; know your water shutoff.
- Have a plan for homes that rely heavily on electric heat.
- Keep winter vehicle supplies even if snow is uncommon locally.
- Monitor forecasts for heavy rain/flooding as well as cold weather.

Midwest & Great Lakes

- Prepare for heavy snow, blowing snow, ice, strong winds, and extreme cold.
- Have a dependable snow/ice removal plan and traction material.
- Protect plumbing and know how to respond to a frozen pipe.
- Prepare for potentially long power outages and difficult travel.
- Keep vehicles ready for cold starts and stranded-traveler situations.

Great Plains & Central Plains

- Prepare for rapidly changing temperatures, strong winds, snow, ice, and blowing snow.
- Have multiple ways to receive warnings because conditions can change quickly.
- Secure outdoor objects before high winds.
- Keep vehicle fuel and winter emergency supplies at appropriate levels.
- Plan for rural/long-distance travel disruptions and longer response times.

Rockies & Mountain West

- Prepare for heavy mountain snow, extreme cold, high winds, and road closures.

- Keep extra food, water, medications, and heating supplies if isolation is possible.
- Check tire/traction requirements for routes you regularly travel.
- Keep snow tools and emergency vehicle supplies readily accessible.
- Consider backup power for well pumps, communications, heating controls, and other critical systems.

Southwest & Desert Southwest

- Prepare for cold snaps even where winter snow is uncommon.
- Protect exposed plumbing and outdoor water equipment from freezing.
- Have backup power for critical home systems and communications.
- Prepare for winter rain and flash flooding where locally relevant.
- Keep a vehicle emergency kit even if normal winter driving is mild.

Pacific Northwest & Northern California

- Prepare for heavy rain, flooding, windstorms, mountain snow, and power outages.
- Clear/inspect drainage paths and address obvious debris before major storms.
- Have backup lighting, power, communications, food, and water.
- Prepare for landslide/road-closure disruptions where applicable.
- If you live in a mountain or high-elevation area, add snow/ice supplies.

Southern California & Desert West

- Prepare for winter rain, flooding, strong winds, and mountain snow where applicable.
- Keep drainage areas clear and know local flood-prone routes.
- Maintain backup power and communications for outages.
- Keep vehicle supplies for sudden road closures or mountain travel.
- Protect exposed plumbing during unusual cold snaps.

Alaska

- Prepare for prolonged cold, snow, wind, darkness, and potential isolation.
- Maintain robust heating backup and backup power for critical systems.
- Keep substantial household supplies if resupply may be delayed.
- Prepare vehicles for extreme cold and carry appropriate emergency gear.
- Protect fuel, water, pipes, and other critical infrastructure from freezing.

Hawaii

- Winter preparedness may focus more on heavy rain, flooding, wind, and storm-related outages than snow.
- Keep water, food, lighting, charging, first aid, and communications supplies.
- Clear/maintain drainage areas where appropriate.
- Have a plan for roads or bridges becoming temporarily impassable.
- Monitor local National Weather Service and emergency-management alerts.

72-HOUR QUICK INVENTORY

Category	Target / Check	Done
Water	3 days; 1 gal/person/day when feasible	■
Food	3+ days nonperishable	■
Lighting	Flashlights/lanterns + batteries	■
Power	Backup plan for critical loads	■
Heat	Safe backup/warmth plan	■
Communications	Alerts + radio + charged phones	■
Health	First aid + essential medications	■
Home	Water shutoff + pipe/weatherization plan	■
Vehicle	Fuel, tires, battery, winter kit	■
Pets/Family	Special needs covered	■

BEFORE THE STORM

- Check the latest forecast and official warnings for your area.
- Charge phones, power banks, radios, and battery systems.
- Bring in or secure loose outdoor items.
- Fill/prepare vehicle fuel as appropriate.
- Confirm emergency contacts and household plan.
- Check on neighbors or family members who may need assistance, when safe.
- Avoid unnecessary travel if dangerous conditions are expected.

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE

This checklist is for general preparedness and does not replace official emergency instructions. Follow your local National Weather Service office, emergency management agency, utility provider, and local authorities during an active event. Never use generators, grills, camp stoves, or other fuel-burning appliances inside a home, garage, or enclosed space. Keep generators outdoors and away from doors, windows, and vents.

Preparedness information adapted from general winter-storm guidance from FEMA/Ready.gov and NOAA/National Weather Service resources. Seasonal outlooks describe probabilities and broad patterns; they do not predict the exact weather at a specific home.