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Health officials urge caution when working outdoors to avoid excessive exertion

Heavy snowfall across WV from the remnants of Hurricane Sandy has health officials reminding residents to avoid excessive exertion that can lead to heart attacks as wind speeds increase.

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Commissioner for Public Health and State Health Officer Dr. Marian Swinker said, "We know that cold weather can increase extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold. If you have to do heavy outdoor chores or insist on shoveling snow, dress warmly and work slowly. Near freezing temperature is considered a factor for 'cold stress'. Whenever temperatures drop decidedly below normal and as wind speed increases, heat can more rapidly leave your body. These weather-related conditions may lead to serious health problems. Your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so don't overdo it."

Dr. Swinker says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers the following tips for dressing warmly and staying dry.

Adults and children should wear:

- a hat
- a scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth
- sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- water-resistant coat and boots
- several layers of loose-fitting clothing

Dr. Swinker says, "Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind. Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors."

If at any time you experience chest pains, feeling lightheaded or shortness of breath, or if your heart starts racing, you should head indoors right away. If you think you might be experiencing a heart attack or if medical attention is needed call 911.

To learn more about preparedness, visit www.wvdhhr.org/healthprep.