



# BCHD PRESS RELEASE

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Baltimore City Health Department  
1001 E. Fayette Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202  
*Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor*  
*Jacquelyn Duval-Harvey, PhD, Interim Commissioner of Health*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Mayor and Health Commissioner Announce Code Blue Program for Winter 2014-15**

**BALTIMORE, MD** (November 21, 2014) — Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and Baltimore City Interim Health Commissioner Jacquelyn Duval-Harvey, PhD, today announced the start of Baltimore City's Code Blue program for this coming winter. Code Blue is a multi-agency coordinated approach to providing vulnerable populations in Baltimore City with relief from extreme cold weather. The program's goal is to reduce the number of hypothermia deaths and related illnesses in the city.

The greatest risk of illness and deaths due to cold weather is from December to February, with the risk peaking in January, typically the coldest winter month.

"Last year was one of the coldest winters we have experienced in some time and we were kept quite busy working to protect city residents," said Mayor Rawlings-Blake. "It is vitally important that our agencies work together to protect our citizens, especially those most vulnerable such as seniors and homeless, from the cold temperatures that could prove life threatening in the most serious cases."

"While the first official day of winter is not for another four weeks, we have already experienced some chilly evenings and overnights," said Dr. Duval-Harvey. "As the cold temperatures approach with greater frequency, we will be actively monitoring weather changes and reminding people to stay indoors in safely heated areas to minimize the risk of hypothermia. If individuals must go outside in the cold, we urge them to dress warmly and stay as dry as possible. For those experiencing homelessness, we encourage them to take advantage of shelter resources that will be provided."

Through March 2015, the Health Commissioner will declare a Code Blue alert based on the following criteria:

- When temperatures, including wind chill, are expected to be 13°F or below. This threshold can be reached by having a temperature at or below 20°F with 5 mph sustained winds or a temperature at or below 25°F with 15 mph sustained winds.
- When other conditions (i.e. strong winds, forecasted precipitation for more than two hours, extended periods of cold, sudden cold after a warm period) are deemed by the Health Commissioner to be severe enough to present a substantial threat to the life or health of vulnerable Baltimore citizens.

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Code Blue indicates an increased risk for cold injuries or even death for those exposed to low temperatures. Once a Code Blue declaration is made, public messaging activities are undertaken to encourage safety when outdoors and response partners such as the Mayor's Office of Human Services - Homeless Services work to ensure those in need find sheltering.

During a Code Blue, the Mayor's Office of Human Services will continue to operate a 24-hour Housing & Resource Center for men and women at 620 Fallsway with 60 additional spaces available for residents seeking meals and sleeping quarters. Private homeless shelters will be encouraged to extend their hours and keep people indoors.

### Baltimore Code Blue Stats For Past Three Winters

| Winter Season | Code Blue Days Declared | Hypothermia-Related Deaths |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2013-14       | 34                      | 4                          |
| 2012-13       | 10                      | 5                          |
| 2011-12       | 11                      | 3                          |

Based on historical data from Baltimore and data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the vulnerable populations targeted by this plan include:

- Street dwellers and the homeless
- Individuals abusing drugs (heroin/methadone), alcohol, or other substances
- Economically disadvantaged and without home heating
- Elderly persons and young children
- Individuals suffering from pre-existing heart conditions and diabetes
- Individuals with mental health problems

#### **Cold Weather Tips for Staying Healthy:**

- Wear multiple layers of loose-fitting clothing
- Always wear a head covering, like a hat and/or scarf, when outdoors
- Keep space heaters and candles away from flammable materials, such as curtains, furniture and loose clothing
- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcoholic beverages
- Check on those who are elderly and/or chronically ill
- Provide appropriate shelter for domestic animals
- Heart patients are advised against physical exertion in colder temperatures
- Protect yourself against falls in icy or snowy conditions

Extreme cold weather presents risks in addition to hypothermia as residents use prohibited alternative heat or power sources, such as a stoves and generators that may cause fire or carbon monoxide poisoning. Residents are encouraged to contact 311 if a neighbor is without heat or power so that city agencies can assist them. Energy assistance may be available to those who need it. For more information, individuals may contact the Office of Home Energy Programs at 410-396-5555.

Additional cold-weather resources for the public including a listing of city and private shelters, is available on the Health Department's website ([health.baltimorecity.gov](http://health.baltimorecity.gov)). For other cold-related inquiries and service requests, or to find a nearby homeless shelter, residents can call 311 (410-396-3100 after hours).

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