

US winter storm will bring frostbite within minutes

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Plunging temperatures **wreaking havoc** across the US and Canada can lead to **frostbite on bare skin** in only five to 10 minutes, experts are warning.



A powerful Arctic winter storm has placed more than 135 million people **under** (**'under' should preferably read 'on'**) weekend weather **alerts** ahead of the busiest travel days of the year. The alerts stretch from coast to coast and reach as far south as the US-Mexico border and Florida, the Sunshine State. Major airports have cancelled thousands of flights as the storm **intensifies**.

The cold snap could bring the iciest Christmas in decades, say forecasters. The National Weather Service (NWS) said temperatures of -50F (-45C) and -70F were possible by the end of this week in some parts of the country.

They warned that **frostbite** will be a major danger. Frostbite is caused when blood flow is reduced, often to **extremities** like the nose and cheeks or fingers and toes. The lack of warm blood can lead to **tissue freezing** and **rupturing**, and in some cases, **amputation**.

"This is not like a snow day, when you were a kid, this is **serious stuff**," President Joe Biden said in a White House briefing on Thursday. The governor of New York state, Kathy Hochul, declared a state of emergency **in anticipation of** the storm.

The NWS has described it as a "**once-in-a-generation**" winter weather event, saying on Thursday that "**life-threatening wind chills**" will strike the east coast on Friday. Snow and powerful winds are expected to cause damage and power outages in the Midwest and Canada. The NWS warned more than 100 daily cold temperature **records** could be **tied** or **broken** over the next few days.



Travellers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport have been met with flight delays and cancellations

More than 5,300 flights in the US have already been cancelled on Thursday and Friday, according to the **flight-tracking** site FlightAware.

In anticipation of travel **disruptions**, major airlines including United, Delta and American have offered to waive fees for travellers who wish to **reschedule** their flights.

How to stay safe at home

Americans in the upper Midwestern US and Great Lakes region - where more than one foot (30cm) of snow is expected in some areas - should **abide by a rule of thumb** for household storm **preparedness**. "The first 72 are on you," said Eric Stern, a professor at the University of Albany's College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity.

This means that individuals and families should have enough food, water and essential **medications** to last at least 72 hours - or three days. It's wise to be prepared with supplies for even longer periods than that, especially for **vulnerable** populations like the elderly and those with health conditions, Prof Stern said. Michael Muccilli, the winter programme co-ordinator with the National Weather Service, advises stocking up on first aid supplies, a torch and batteries in case of a power outage.

People should also have an emergency heat source such as a properly ventilated generator and a functional carbon monoxide detector.

Winter supplies are useful as well, including ice melt salt and a spade to help clear pavements and driveways of heavy snow.

How to stay safe on the roads

For longer journeys, drivers check forecasts and conditions for key points along the trip as well as the destination. Travellers should aim to be "**well rested, well fed and well hydrated**" before starting a winter journey, Dr Stern said, adding that their vehicle should be in good condition and have snow tires fitted.

Before heading out, drivers need to stock their car with a full tank of petrol as well as an emergency supply kit containing warm clothing, a mobile phone charger, jumper cables, a first aid kit as well as salt, a snow shovel and snow brush for if the car gets **stuck**, according to experts.

If conditions turn out to be more dangerous than expected, **reassess**, said Dr Stern. "Do not let pride stop you from turning around or seeking safety along the way," he said. And for those stuck in traffic, the safest bet is almost always to stay in the car as long as it has heat, as stepping outside in a blizzard can lead to **hypothermia** and cause drivers to become **disoriented**, according to experts.



The winter storm is expected to hit the Midwestern US and Great Lakes from Wednesday