

KEEP WARM WITH HELP FROM LEAP

The winter is off to a frigid start in Colorado. With temperatures hovering near record lows on many days and snow on the ground, nothing is more comforting than a warm house. However, comfort is not the only reason to keep your home warm in the New Year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to cold temperatures - even indoors - can be extremely harmful to the well being of children and senior citizens, those most vulnerable to health problems caused by extreme cold.

Children and senior citizens can lose body heat easily and are more likely to have preexisting conditions that are aggravated by cold. Children and seniors also tend to have low defenses, leaving them more susceptible to colds, the flu and pneumonia. The Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) can help prevent these issues by assisting families with their heating bills through the cold winter months.

“While healthy adults may be able to withstand colder temperatures in the home, children and the elderly are at risk of developing health problems,” said LEAP director Todd Jorgensen. “This is why it is so important to keep a house warm. LEAP can help families cover heating costs, making sure that the home is safe for all of its inhabitants.”

LEAP is a federally funded program that provides cash assistance to help families and individuals pay winter home heating costs. The program pays the highest benefits to those with the highest heating bills and lowest incomes by family size. Applicant income cannot exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty index, which equals a maximum income of \$3,400 per month before taxes for a household of four people.

While LEAP provides assistance paying for heating bills, there are additional ways to keep warm and safe during the winter months. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) offers the following tips:

- If you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful.
 - * Have chimney and flue inspected.
 - * Install a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated. Test them monthly, and replace batteries twice yearly.
- If you don't need extra ventilation, keep as much heat as possible inside your home. Avoid unnecessary opening of doors or windows. Close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors, and close draperies or cover windows with blankets at night.
- Eating well-balanced meals will help you stay warmer. Do not drink alcoholic or caffeinated beverages—they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly. Instead, drink warm, sweet beverages or broth to help maintain your body temperature.
- Extreme cold can cause water pipes in your home to freeze and sometimes rupture. Insulate any water lines that run along outer walls. When very cold temperatures are expected:
 - * Leave all water taps slightly open so they drip continuously.
 - * Keep the indoor temperature warm.
 - * Improve the circulation of heated air near pipes. For example, open kitchen cabinet doors beneath the kitchen sink.

LEAP is currently accepting applications and will continue to do so until April 30, 2010. To qualify for LEAP, applicants must be responsible for paying heating costs directly to an energy provider, fuel dealer or as part of rent; be a permanent legal resident of the United States and Colorado or have household members that are U.S. citizens.

For more information about LEAP, please call 1-866-HEAT-HELP (1-866-432-8435) or visit www.cdhs.state.co.us/leap to view the most current program application requirements.