Syndromic Surveillance Guidelines for Winter Weather Queries

INTRODUCTION: Winter storms create significant stress by causing power outages, dangerous travel conditions, and isolation, often leading to injury, anxiety, exhaustion, and, in severe cases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) like symptoms.

OBJECTIVE: To examine and identify emergency department (ED) visits statewide to evaluate public health impact due to inclement weather. Syndromic surveillance is used to detect ED visits related to injury caused by inclement weather including snow, ice, and related power outages.

ACTIVATION: Syndromic surveillance monitoring during inclement weather is initiated when a winter storm warning including snow or ice has been issued. Monitoring begins at the start of the winter storm warning and concludes when related visits return to baseline levels.

Query	Inclusion Criteria

• **Query:** (,^;ice;^,OR,^;icy;^,OR,^slide^,OR,^skate^,OR,^sleet^,OR,^frozen^,OR,^ice bead^,OR,^frozenrain^,OR,^snow^,OR,^snowy^,ANDNOT,^snowboarding^,)
• All key terms are run on the Chief Complaint History, Triage Notes, Chief Complaint Combo Free Text, Admit Reason Combo, and Clinical Impression
	• All 55 counties in West Virginia
	• All hospitals with ED visits in West Virginia
	• Defined timeframe; Example: January 3, 2026 – January 7, 2026
	• Query is expanded to cover additional data details such as:
	  ○ Chief complaint
	  ○ Triage notes
	  ○ Clinical impression
	  ○ Discharge diagnosis

PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

Home Preparation

- **Weatherproof:** Insulate water lines near exterior walls, caulk and weather-strip windows and doors, and clear overhanging tree branches.
- **Heat safely:** Have your furnace checked yearly. Install smoke and battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors, and never use an oven or grill to heat your home.
- **Stock supplies:** Keep a week's worth of non-perishable food, water, and emergency medicine on hand.

Vehicle and Travel Safety

- **Service your car:** Check antifreeze levels, switch to winter wiper fluid, and maintain proper tire pressure and tread. Keep the gas tank near full.
- **Pack a kit:** Store a cell phone with a portable charger, blankets, extra warm clothes, a flashlight, a small shovel, and snacks in your car.
- **Limit travel:** Stay off icy roads and avoid driving during low-visibility conditions.

Health and Outdoor Safety

- **Dress warmly:** Wear several loose layers of lightweight clothing, a hat, waterproof boots, and insulated gloves.

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- **Prevent cold stress:** Limit time outside during extreme cold, and watch for signs of hypothermia (shivering, confusion, exhaustion) and frostbite (numb or pale skin).
- **Avoid overexertion:** Take frequent breaks when shoveling heavy snow to prevent heart strain.

DATA LIMITATIONS:

- Data is delayed and may arrive 24 hours later, and up to 72 hours from the emergency department visit.

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