

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Be Prepared and Aware!

Coldwater, MI. With the holiday season getting underway and gas prices at an all-time low since 2008, AAA is predicting that 1.5 million Michiganders will be on the roads traveling this holiday weekend. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind everyone to be prepared and aware when traveling this winter. According to Steve Todd, Health Officer for the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, “Like most rural communities, our jurisdiction continues to experience higher rates of death due to motor vehicle accidents than other more populated areas of state. So we want people to be safe when traveling this winter – especially this weekend when many so many will be going great distances to reunite with friends and family or to get a big jump on their holiday shopping.”

Getting around in the winter can be downright difficult when faced with a less than prepared vehicle. With the advent of winter upon us, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you that, with a little preparation, your winter trips can be safer. Consider the following tips:

- 1. Take a look at your tires.** Do they have good tread? In years past we put on snow tires when the first icy winds came down from the North; today however most vehicles are equipped with radial tires which have an all season tread and are quite suitable for winter use.
- 2. Install new windshield wipers.** When snow and ice buildup on the windshields, wiper blades can get heavily abused. Starting the winter season with new blades ensures that your vision will not be compromised because of worn out wipers. Also, make sure the washer solvent is filled. It is likely you will be using more solvent during the winter months than in summer. It is a good idea to keep a spare gallon of solvent handy in the trunk of the car; it's not likely to freeze and it will be available should the washer nozzles freeze.
- 3. Have belts and hoses inspected.** Have a mechanic inspect belts and hoses under the hood to make sure they will survive the torture of another Michigan winter.

4. Check the anti-freeze levels. While under the hood, be sure check to see if anti-freeze levels are adequate. Your anti-freeze (coolant) should be fresh and at a level that can withstand Michigan temperatures, which can fall well below zero.

5. Have adequate supplies on hand. Keep a blanket, an ice scraper/brush, and a small stash of granola bars, crackers, or other emergency food supplies stashed in the car. While it's not recommend that you keep water bottles in a vehicle (they may freeze and break) it is always good to take an extra bottle of water with you on every trip, even if it is just to the store. Finding yourself in a ditch waiting for rescue can be a cold and hungry experience; having the proper supplies will make your wait a bit easier.

6. Make sure your vehicle maintains at least a half tank of gas. When your vehicle idles in the winter it may expend more fuel than during other times of the year. If you become stranded, an empty fuel tank means a cold wait for help.

7. Make sure that your cell phone is always charged. Keep a car charger in your vehicle; even if your phone's battery is dead it can use the energy from your car battery to make an emergency call. All cell phones will dial 9-1-1 free of charge. You may also want to keep the number of a local tow service stored in your phone just for an emergency.

8. Always dress appropriately! If your social schedule requires stylish shoes and evening attire, make sure you have a good winter coat, boots, gloves and a hat in the car. Even for a quick trip to town, it is important to have a coat and good footwear available. Keep a bag full of these items in your trunk and leave them there for when you might need them. Pack similar bags for others that regularly ride in the car with you.

9. Stay hydrated. Just because you don't perspire as much in the winter does not mean that you don't have to drink as much water. Lack of hydration along with cold temperatures can bring on hypothermia or shock much quicker. So keep your water bottle full and available.

10. Have a "trip plan." Make sure someone knows you are going out, and when you expect to be back. While it might be tempting to go down the road or to the nearest gas station, it is best to stay with your vehicle until help arrives. If you are stranded:

- Turn on your emergency flashers!
- Call for help on your cell phone or have a passer-by call for you; let someone know where you are.
- Open a window an inch or so if you are running the engine. If carbon monoxide is getting into your vehicle it will be vented out.

- Stay with your vehicle until help arrives if at all possible. *Only as a last resort* should you leave your vehicle.

Whatever you do and wherever you go this winter, always be safe first! For further information on winter health and safety issues, please visit the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency's web site at: www.bhsj.org.

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