



# Ready Wisconsin

Be Informed. Plan Ahead. Take Action.

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## *For Immediate Release*

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## **November 18-22 is Winter Weather Awareness Week in Wisconsin**

MADISON, Wis. – As winter approaches and before colder temperatures set in, now is the perfect time to plan and be prepared for the upcoming season. To help encourage everyone to be winter ready, Gov. Tony Evers has declared Nov. 18 – 22 as Winter Weather Awareness Week in Wisconsin.

“Winter weather can lead to dangerous conditions including snowstorms, icy roads, and below freezing temperatures, said Greg Engle, Wisconsin Emergency Management administrator. “By planning ahead, we can ensure families and communities are safe during the colder winter months.”

Being aware of weather conditions is essential for being prepared. The National Weather Service (NWS) and other reliable local sources will have forecast information to inform you of potential inclement weather. Recently, the NWS simplified their cold weather terminology.

- Wind Chill Watches were renamed to an Extreme Cold Watch
- Wind Chill Warnings were renamed to an Extreme Cold Warning
- Wind Chill Advisory was renamed a Cold Weather Advisory

“These changes are part of a nation-wide effort to simplify the amount of hazard headlines the National Weather Service has,” said Tim Halbach. “Instead of using separate terms like “Extreme Cold” and “Wind Chill” warnings to describe similar cold conditions, they will now use just one: “Extreme Cold Watch/Warning/Advisory. This is because there are situations that can be extremely cold without much wind.”

Extreme cold temperatures can be dangerous for many people, leading to cold-related illnesses and injuries such as hypothermia and frostbite. There were 45 cold-related deaths in the state during the winter months of 2023-2024\*, according to preliminary data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. According to that data, there were 861 emergency department visits and 225 hospitalizations in the state due to cold-related illnesses.

“Getting ready for snow and bitter cold before they hit can help prevent trips to the emergency room and it might even save a life,” said Paula Tran, state health officer and administrator for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. “During cold snaps, it’s especially important to check

on neighbors and loved ones to make sure they're warm enough where they are and help get them to a warm space if needed.”

When dangerously cold temperatures arrive, it's important to follow extreme cold warnings and minimize time outdoors, including pets. If you have to be outside, dress for the weather and make sure you cover exposed skin to reduce your risk of frostbite and hypothermia. Call 211 or visit <https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/> to find local warming centers and free winter clothing outlets. Finally, take precautions to avoid slips, trips, and falls in icy conditions and snow shoveling injuries.

When dangerously cold temperatures arrive, it is important to reduce outdoor activities for your family, including your pets. Make sure you wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing instead of a single heavy layer. Outerwear should be tightly woven and water repellant. Make sure you cover exposed skin to reduce your risk. It is also important to know the signs and symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia.

Ice and snow on the roads are a major threat to drivers throughout the state, causing thousands of motor vehicle crashes each year. Preliminary data from the Wisconsin State Patrol shows 9 people were killed and 2,262 were injured in the state last winter\* from crashes involving winter road conditions.

“We all have a responsibility to protect each other and our plow drivers who work long hours to keep roads clear and help us get where we need to go,” WisDOT Secretary Kristina Boardman said. “We ask drivers to remember the basics: slow down, maintain extra following distance from other vehicles and avoid distractions so you can focus on getting to your destination safely. Check 511 Wisconsin to stay up to date on road conditions and know before you go.”

511 Wisconsin is a free website and mobile app that provides traffic and route-specific information. It is important to check 511 Wisconsin before you drive. To learn more about traffic information or check out hundreds of traffic cameras statewide, people can access the mobile-friendly website at [www.511wi.gov](http://www.511wi.gov).

At home or in your car, winter emergency kits should include items such as food, water, a flashlight and batteries, and blankets. In your vehicle, include a snow shovel, extra gloves and hats, cell phone charger, and kitty litter or sand to help give your wheels traction on icy roads if your vehicle gets stuck.

To prepare for winter storms, stock up on additional supplies and have a plan for what to do if you lose power at home. Plan for extra batteries and other alternative power sources for your needs, including power banks or a generator. Keep generator safety in mind while it is in operation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning and other hazards.

- Generators should be used outdoors and at least 20 feet away from windows, doors, and attached garages
- Make sure you have working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home
- Follow manufacturer's instructions carefully

According to the NWS, Wisconsin experiences an average of three to six winter storms during the season. Last winter, the highest one-day snowfall total in the state of 17 inches was reported in Jackson, located in Washington County on Jan. 13, 2024. Hurley in Iron County recorded 75.5-inches of snow last winter, giving it the highest seasonal snowfall total in the state. The coldest temperature recorded in Wisconsin last winter was -18 degrees Fahrenheit on Jan. 15-16, 2024, in Clinton, located in Rock County.

You can also follow ReadyWisconsin on [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#) for tips throughout the winter months and updates on dangerous weather conditions.

You can also learn more tips at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/winter-weather.htm>

*\*2023 and 2024 data are provisional and subject to change.*



*ReadyWisconsin is a public safety campaign organized through Wisconsin Emergency Management,  
a Division of the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs*

# Winter Weather Messaging

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues winter storm warnings, watches and advisories. Here's what they mean and what you should do.

**Winter Weather Advisory** – These are issued for winter weather events that are more of an inconvenience than a life-threatening situation if caution is exercised. These are often issued when three to five inches of snow, blowing and drifting snow, freezing rain, or a combination of these elements are expected.

**Winter Storm Watch** – Issued when there is a potential for a winter storm to affect the region during the next one to three days. It does not always mean the area will experience a winter storm, there is still some uncertainty of the exact path or timing of the event.

**Winter Storm Warning** – Issued when dangerous winter weather is expected, occurring, or imminent. The weather can become life-threatening. Criteria includes six inches of snow or more in 12 hours, eight inches in 24 hours, or lower amounts if accompanied by strong winds or a combination of dangerous winter elements. Avoid unnecessary travel.

**Blizzard Warning** – This is the most dangerous winter event. Blizzard warnings are issued when snow or blowing snow lowers visibility to 0.25 miles or less, wind gusts hit 35mph or higher, and the storm lasts for three hours or more. Travel is dangerous and should be avoided if possible.



**Winter Storm Planning Timeline**

A few days out	The day before	During & After
<p><i>If the forecast calls for winter weather, start preparing now.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Have emergency supplies for your home &amp; car</li><li>Check your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors</li><li>Replenish fuel for your car and heating sources</li></ul>	<p><i>Forecast accuracy continues to improve, so keep checking the latest.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Adjust plans</li><li>Have multiple ways to receive Warnings</li><li>Bring pets indoors and ensure they have water</li></ul>	<p><i>Remain vigilant and stay informed. Drive only if necessary.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Check on neighbors and family</li><li>Properly ventilate emergency heat sources</li><li>Keep generators at least 20 feet from your home</li><li>Take it easy when shoveling</li></ul>

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**Ice Storm Warning** - Issued when freezing rain will cause widespread glazing. A coating of ice is expected to reach 0.25-inches thick or more on objects and make travel nearly impossible. For lesser amounts of ice.

**Snow Squall Warning** - A short duration warning issued for a relatively small geographic area when intense short-lived bursts of heavy snowfall occur. Although rare, these snow squalls can lead to quick reductions in visibilities, 0.25 miles or less, and often accompanied by gusty winds. Sudden whiteout conditions and slick roads can develop.

**Cold Weather Advisory** – Wind chill or temperature of  $-20^{\circ}\text{F}$  in the next 12 to 24 hours.

**Extreme Cold Watch** - Wind chill or temperature of  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$  is possible in the next 24 to 72 hours.

**Extreme Cold Warning** - Wind chill or temperature of  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$  is imminent in the next 12 to 36 hours.

The infographic is set against a background of a snowy street scene with a building in the distance. It features two dark blue panels with white and light blue text. The left panel is titled 'EXTREME COLD WATCH' and describes a situation where dangerously cold air is 'possible'. It advises checking the forecast and being prepared. The right panel is titled 'EXTREME COLD WARNING' and describes a situation where dangerously cold air is 'expected'. It advises taking action to avoid frostbite and hypothermia. At the bottom right, there is a 'weather.gov' logo and the NOAA logo.

**EXTREME COLD WATCH**

An Extreme Cold Watch is issued when dangerously cold air, with or without wind, is **possible**.

Check the forecast, and be prepared in case a Warning is issued.

**Be Prepared**

**EXTREME COLD WARNING**

An Extreme Cold Warning is issued when dangerously cold air, with or without wind, is **expected**.

Conditions could lead to frostbite or hypothermia. Limit time outside, dress in layers, and cover up exposed skin.

**Take Action!**

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# Winter Driving in Wisconsin

Navigating slushy, snow-covered, or icy roads in winter can be tough and stressful, but a few key tips can make all the difference in getting you to your destination safely.

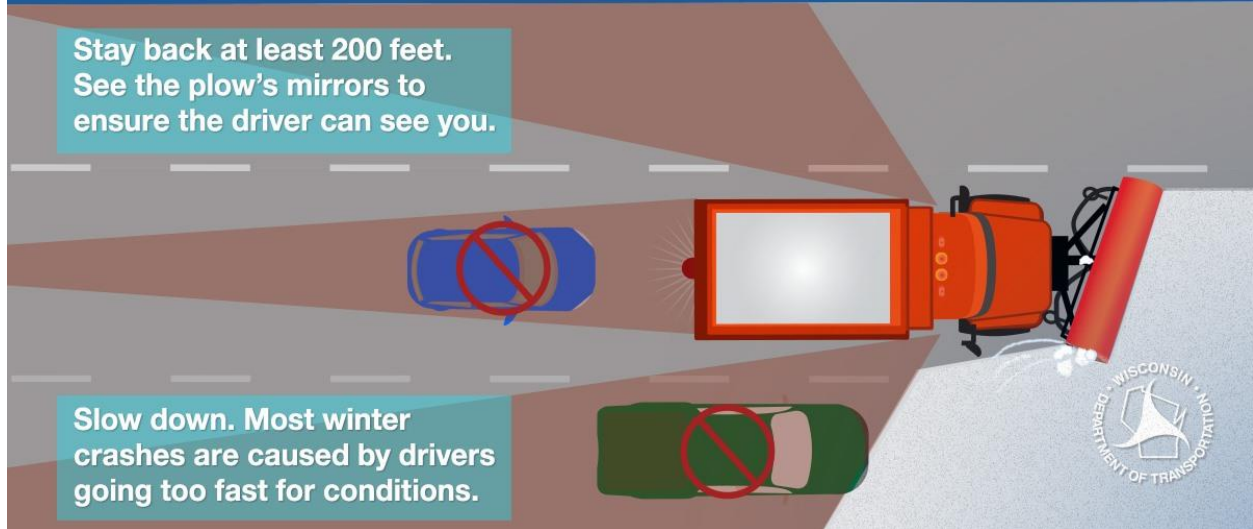
The first significant snowfall of the season can cause several issues, including car crashes. This is usually due to many drivers being less accustomed to slick road conditions caused by wintry weather.

When a major winter storm hits, it's often best to delay your trip until conditions improve. Stranded vehicles add to the dangers for plow crews, law enforcement, and emergency responders. But if you absolutely must travel, here's what you need to know:

- Before heading out, learn the latest about highway conditions and incidents by visiting [511wi.gov](http://511wi.gov). Let others know about your planned route and expected arrival time. Fully charge your cell phone.
- Clear snow and ice from your vehicle's windows, front and rear lights, roof and hood. Ensure everyone is buckled up.
- Take it slow. Allow extra travel time and following distance. Most winter crashes and slide-offs are caused by drivers going too fast for the existing conditions. Remember, posted speed limits apply to ideal travel conditions.
- Turn on your vehicle's low-beam headlights. This helps you see what's ahead, and helps other drivers see you. State law requires drivers to turn on their vehicle's low-beam headlights any time that weather or other conditions make it difficult to see objects 500 feet ahead.
- Sudden braking or steering can cause you to lose control of your vehicle. Use brakes early and carefully. With anti-lock-brakes (ABS), use firm, steady pressure and gently steer. Never use cruise control in wintry weather.
- Don't be overconfident in your four-wheel or all-wheel-drive vehicle. All vehicles require additional time and distance to stop in adverse conditions.
- Remember that bridge decks/overpasses can be especially slippery, even when adjacent pavements are in good travel condition.
- Watch for snowplows. Stay at least 200 feet behind a working plow and use extra caution if you decide to pass. Plows often create a cloud of snow that can obscure visibility, and road conditions ahead of the plow are likely worse.
- Keep a safe distance behind large trucks. Along with obscuring your view of the road ahead, pieces of snow or ice can blow off the top of commercial trucks as they travel down the highway.



# Don't Crowd the Plow



Winter storm advisories/warnings are routinely posted on Dynamic Message Signs along major highway corridors. Heed this information and drive accordingly. Winter storm events often have moderate to significant travel impacts.

Be mindful of your location using crossroads, mileposts or key landmarks. If you do become stranded, you'll be better prepared to describe your location for law enforcement or tow truck operators.

## **Staying safe if stranded**

- Stay calm. It's generally safest to stay buckled up inside your vehicle. Along with protecting you from the elements, your vehicle offers protection should other vehicles slide out of control. Getting out of your vehicle and walking near a highway is dangerous any time of year.
- If possible, call 911 on your cell phone. Be ready to describe your location and situation. Follow any instructions. You may be told to stay where you are until help arrives.
- Resist the urge to get out of your vehicle and shovel or push your vehicle free. Overexertion can greatly complicate your situation, and being outside your vehicle exposes you to dangers.
- If necessary to stay warm, run your vehicle's engine for brief periods (make sure the exhaust system is working properly and not blocked by snow). Using portable heaters inside vehicles or other enclosed spaces can be dangerous.
- Keeping your dome light on during low-light conditions can make it easier for rescue crews to find you. Remember, the storm will end. You will be found.

## **Keep a Winter Emergency Kit in Your Vehicle**

Have a vehicle emergency supply kit in the back seat of your vehicle (in case your trunk jams or is frozen shut) that includes:

- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Extra hats, socks, boots and mittens
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First-aid kit
- Shovel, booster cables and windshield scraper
- Water and high-calorie non-perishable food (raisins, candy bars, energy/protein bars)
- Multi-tool
- Sand or cat litter to use for traction
- Cell phone charger



## **Calling for help**

- If possible, call 911 on your cell phone. Provide your location, condition of everyone in the vehicle and the problem you're experiencing.
- Follow instructions. You may be told to stay where you are until help arrives.
- Do not hang up until you know who you have spoken with and what will happen next.
- If you must leave the vehicle, write down your name, address, phone number and destination. Place the piece of paper inside the front windshield for someone to see.

## **Wisconsin Winter Road Maintenance Facts**

- The Wisconsin DOT contracts with all 72 county highway departments in the state to maintain the state highway system. (Interstates, federal and state numbered highways)
- There are 115,000 miles of local streets and county and state highways in Wisconsin including 11,000 miles or including more than 34,000 lane miles (one lane mile equals a one-mile roadway that is 12 feet wide) of state-maintained highways.
- WisDOT's snow removal program divides the state-maintained highways into 5 categories based on the highway's traffic volumes, use, and configuration. The goal for each category of roadway is to achieve "passable roadways" during a winter storm.
  - Passable roadways are defined as roadways that are free of drifts, snow ridges, and as much ice and snowpack as is practical and can be traveled at reasonable speeds. A reasonable speed is one in which a vehicle can travel without losing traction.
- WisDOT uses an average of 452,000 tons of salt and 21,000 tons of sand per season statewide. The total storage capacity of salt for use on state-maintained highways is about 654,000 tons.

WisDOT has more winter driving information that can be found at <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/safety/education/winter-drv/default.aspx>



# Cold-related Illnesses and Injuries

## Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition of abnormally low body temperature, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures but can occur at temperatures above 40° F if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

### **Recognize the warning signs of hypothermia.**

- **For adults and children:** shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness.
- **For infants:** bright red or cold skin, very low energy.

### **Taking preventive action**

- Have furnaces checked annually for efficient and safe operation before the heating season arrives.
- Check on elderly relatives, friends and neighbors.
- Monitor the rooms where infants sleep or spend periods of time.
- When spending time outdoors, adults and children should dress warmly and stay dry. If doing strenuous outdoor activities, the National Weather Service recommends to avoid wearing cotton since cotton takes a long time to dry and will sap your heat. Instead, use synthetic fabrics that wick moisture from your skin and dry quickly.
- Layer clothing, preferably wind resistant, to reduce loss of body heat caused by the wind.
- Tell relatives and friends where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

## Frostbite

Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing of the skin and deeper tissues, most commonly occurring on the toes, fingers, chin, cheeks, ears, and nose. It causes the loss of feeling and color in the affected areas. Frostbite can permanently damage body tissues, and severe cases can lead to amputation.

## Chilblains

Chilblains are the painful inflammation of small blood vessels in the skin that occur in response to repeated exposure to cold but nonfreezing temperatures. Small blood vessels in the skin may become permanently damaged by cold temperatures, resulting in redness and itching during additional exposures.

## Trench Foot

Trench foot is an injury of the feet after prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions. Trench foot occurs because wet feet lose heat faster than dry feet. To prevent heat loss, the body constricts blood vessels in the feet, and then the skin tissue begins to die.



## Slips and Falls

Slips occur more often on surfaces that are cold, wet, snowy, slushy, or icy. A fall resulting from a slip can cause severe injury and even death. Slips and falls are the most common work-related winter injuries in Wisconsin.

## Overexertion

Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make an existing medical condition worse.



# Check Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control. In 2022 there were 48 deaths and 373 emergency department visits in Wisconsin due to carbon monoxide poisoning, according to data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. 2022 data are provisional and subject to change.


To protect your family from carbon monoxide, follow these simple safety tips:

- **Make sure you have working CO detectors.** All homes and duplexes in Wisconsin are required to have CO detectors on every level including the basement, but not the attic or storage areas.
- **Have your furnace or wood-burning stove inspected annually** to make sure it is structurally and functionally sound and vents properly to the outside of your home.
- **Never run a gasoline or propane heater or a grill (gas or charcoal) inside your home or an unventilated garage.** Any heating system that burns fuel will produce carbon monoxide. Use a battery-powered detector where you have fuel burning devices but no electric outlets, such as in tents, cabins, RVs, and boats with enclosed cabins.
- **Never run a car in an enclosed space.** If a vehicle is running, you must have a door open to the outside.
- **Generators should be run a safe distance from the home.** Never run a generator in the home or garage, or right next to windows or doors.

Breathing carbon monoxide displaces the oxygen in the blood and can cause death within minutes at high levels. Symptoms of overexposure to carbon monoxide are often mistaken for the flu and include headaches, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath/chest pain, nausea/vomiting, and confusion. If you experience any of these symptoms, or your carbon monoxide detector sounds an alarm, head outside immediately for fresh air and call 911.

For more information on carbon monoxide poisoning, visit:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/air/co.htm>



**Install and test carbon monoxide (CO) alarms at least once a month.**

CO is called the “invisible killer” because it’s a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas. Breathing in CO at high levels can be fatal.

U.S. Fire Administration | FEMA | The Fire Department

# Pets and Winter Weather

Pets also need extra care when the temperatures fall. They should be brought inside when the temperature reaches 30°F with wind chill. Dogs and cats can get frost-bitten ears, nose and feet if left outside during bitter cold weather. Chemicals used to melt snow, and ice can also irritate pets' paws – be sure to keep anti-freeze, salt and other poisons away from pets.



# **Be Prepared at Home**

Some of the dangers associated with winter storms include loss of heat, power and telephone service and a shortage of supplies. To help protect your family, now is the time to put together a disaster supply kit. Here are some items to include:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and a commercial radio
- Bottled water and non-perishable food that requires no cooking
- First-aid supplies
- Fire extinguisher, smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector
- If appropriate, extra medications and baby items
- If you have an emergency heating source such as a fireplace or space heater, make sure you have proper ventilation
- Make sure pets have shelter and plenty of food and water

For additional winter weather messaging and safety tips, you can find information on the following sites:

NWS Winter Safety Campaign: [https://www.weather.gov/wrn/winter\\_safety](https://www.weather.gov/wrn/winter_safety)

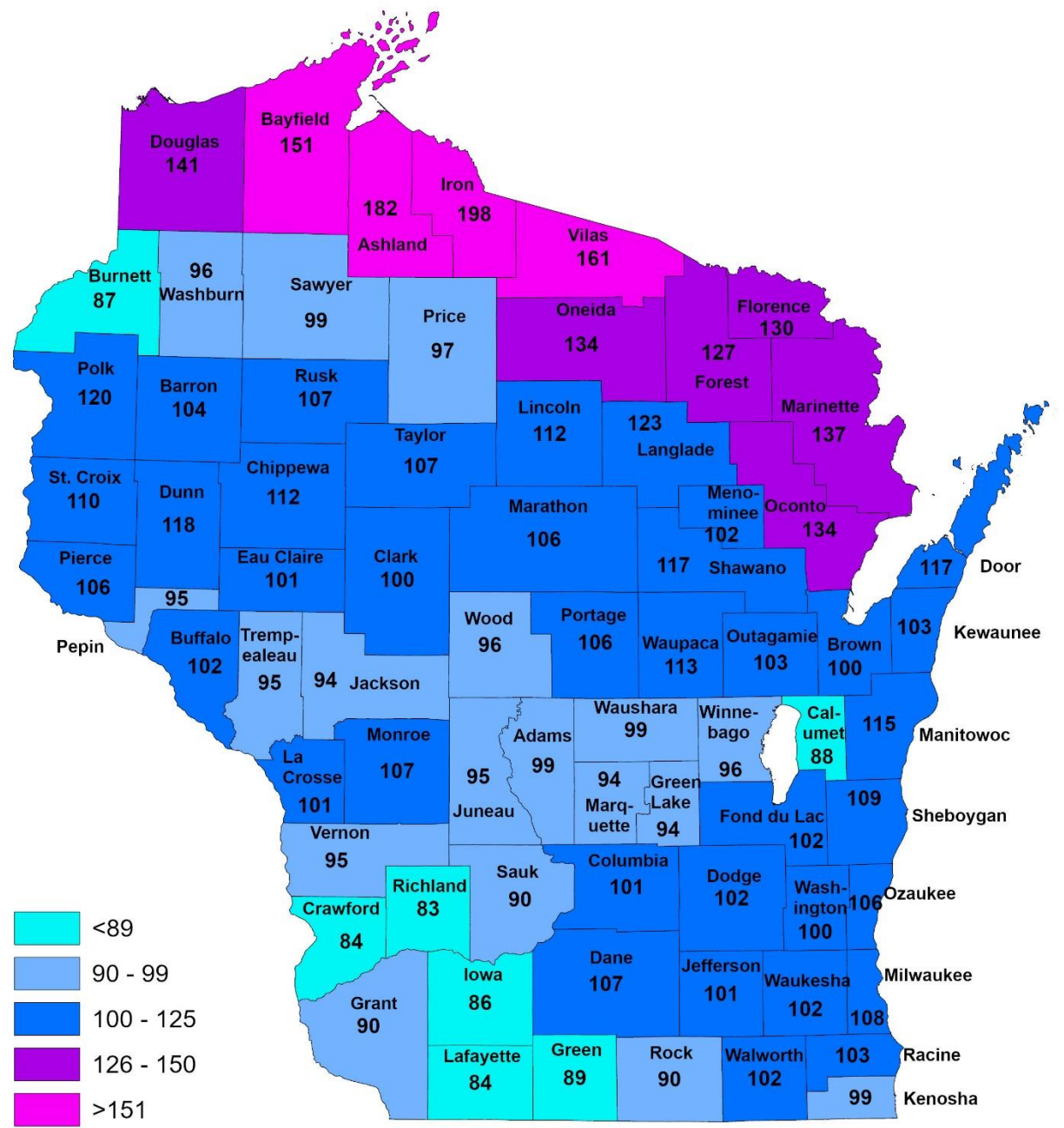
Wisconsin Department of Health Services: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/winter-weather.htm>

Ready.gov: <https://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>



# Wisconsin Winter Storm Events

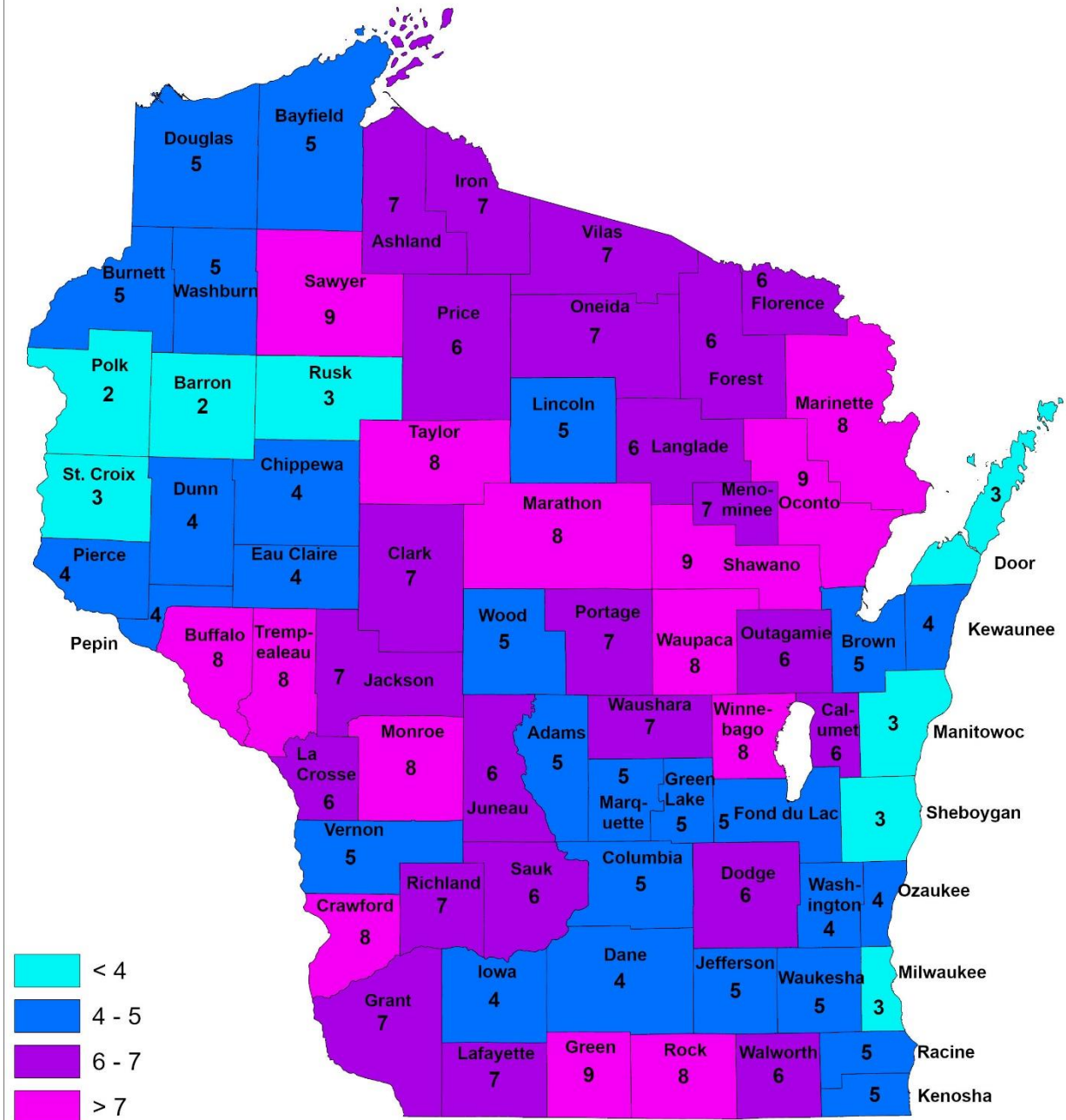
Winter 1982-83 - Winter 2023-24





# Wisconsin Ice Storm Events

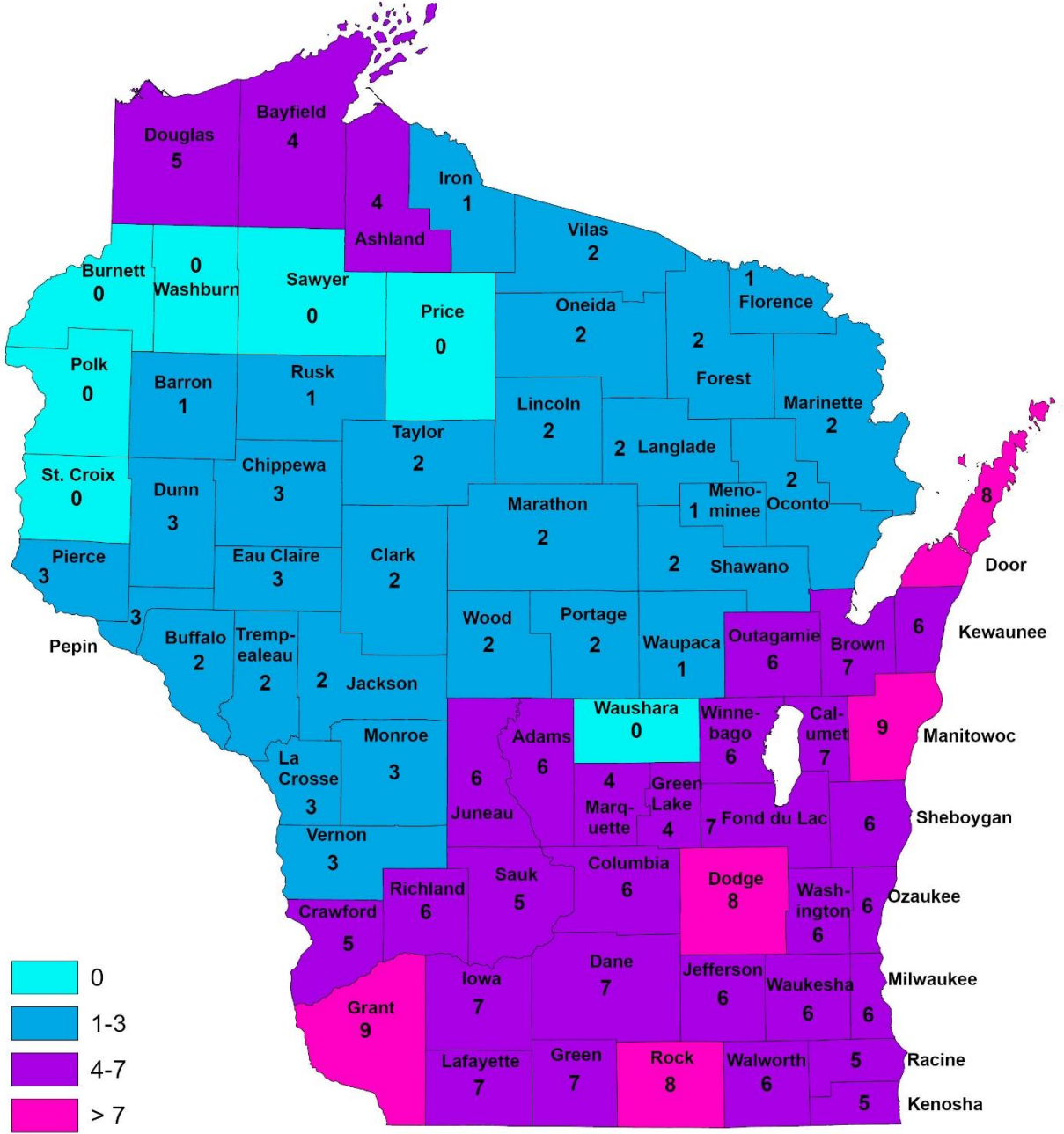
Winter 1982-83 - Winter 2023-24





# Wisconsin Blizzard Events

Winter 1982-83 - Winter 2023-24







# Wisconsin Extreme Cold Events

Winter 1982-83 - Winter 2023-24

