



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/winter-weather-safety>

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## **State weather official urges Kansans to prepare for winter conditions, travel**

Conditions can change rapidly in the Sunflower State, Redmond says

*K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The calendar says the first day of winter is Dec. 21. Chip Redmond is not so sure you ought to get locked in on just that date.

“Winter conditions in Kansas can change rapidly,” said Redmond, a meteorologist and manager of the [Kansas Mesonet](#), a network of weather monitoring stations that has its headquarters at Kansas State University.

In Kansas, he said, “we can have a cold front come through that drops temperatures 50 degrees (Fahrenheit) in just a couple hours. Or, we can go from clear skies to heavy snow very quickly.”

While Kansans can’t do anything about the weather, Redmond says they can prepare themselves to withstand brutal conditions – and keep themselves safe.

### **Cold temperatures**

“The first thing that comes to my mind for winter weather safety is the cold, which brings different dangers – just as heat does in the summer,” Redmond said.

“Our bodies just aren’t prepared to take cold for long periods of time. The cold can quickly have negative effects, especially when we factor in wind.”

Redmond urges people to dress in layers and wear a stocking cap and mittens anytime they must face outdoor cold. He said frostbite or hypothermia can happen very quickly.

“It can be less than even a few minutes, when you get cold and add wind,” Redmond said. “That’s why we look at things like closing schools once temperatures drop below zero or negative-10 with the wind chill. Those conditions produce a much higher risk, so we have to take more proactive steps and try to avoid outdoor activity as much as possible.”

Stocking caps help to keep heat from releasing through the head and “keeps the overall ambient temperature of your body warmer,” according to Redmond. Mittens are preferred over gloves because it maintains warmth by keeping the fingers closely together.

## **Travel safety**

The State of Kansas regularly updates road conditions on the website, <https://kandrive.org>. Redmond encourages those planning travel to check the forecast along the path they will drive, including road conditions.

Redmond also suggests keeping an emergency kit in a car in case the vehicle gets stalled while traveling. In addition to warm clothing, he suggests such items as:

- Snow brush and ice scraper.
- Jumper cables or jumpstarter.
- Blankets.
- Cell phone charger.
- Snack foods.
- Water, or other liquid such as electrolyte drinks.
- Flashlight.
- Sand in a small container.
- Chains or other items to help in pulling a vehicle out of a ditch.

“Some people have tire chains; that may be a bit extravagant,” Redmond said. “If you need tire chains in Kansas, you probably shouldn’t be out on the road to begin with. But sand is useful to help you get out of an area where you don’t have much traction.”

A car’s tires may need some extra air in the winter because they shrink when they get cold, Redmond said. “If you have underinflated tires,” he said, “you’re not going to optimize the grip of that rubber, so you’re going to slip and slide a lot more.”

## **Safety at home**

It’s been a few years since Kansas has been hit by a widespread ice storm, but Redmond says despite current indications for near to slightly-above-normal temperatures this winter, “there is potential for January or February cold snaps this season that could provide some potential for ice storms.”

“Trees are probably the most likely to be damaged in an ice storm,” he said. “Be aware of weakened trees and that you’re going to lose branches. It takes about one-quarter inch of ice to see really big impacts.”

Roads don’t normally accumulate one-quarter inch of ice, “so it’s not as big of a problem for travelers,” Redmond said. “But anything that is standing and tall – such as power lines and trees and gutters – are at risk of falling.”

Redmond also urges homeowners to use caution when removing snow from driveways and sidewalks.

“It’s very demanding physically,” he said. “One of the leading causes of winter heart attacks is shoveling snow because of the stress of pushing that snow -- especially when it is heavy and wet, formed with temperatures near freezing or when it becomes packed.”

For those who own a snow blower, Redmond recommends making sure it has been serviced before first use, “and don’t wait until the last minute” to do so.

More information on Kansas weather conditions, including up-to-date forecasts, is available online from the [Kansas Mesonet](#).

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story  
Kansas road conditions, <https://kandrive.org>

Kansas Mesonet, <https://mesonet.k-state.edu>

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**Story by:**

Pat Melgares  
[melgares@ksu.edu](mailto:melgares@ksu.edu)

**More information:**

Chip Redmond  
785-532-7019  
[christopherredmond@ksu.edu](mailto:christopherredmond@ksu.edu)

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