

# CLIMATE SEASONS & SAFETY



# CLIMATE, SEASONS & SAFETY:



Ontario experiences four distinct seasons: winter, spring, summer, and fall. Each season affects daily life, and it's important to prepare for weather-related challenges to stay safe and healthy

This chapter explains what to expect in each season and provides safety tips for weather extremes, as well as general emergency preparedness.

# WINTER SAFETY

WINTER (DECEMBER TO FEBRUARY, ROUGHLY) IN ONTARIO CAN BE VERY COLD, ESPECIALLY IN JANUARY. TEMPERATURES IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO OFTEN RANGE FROM  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  TO  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , AND NORTHERN ONTARIO CAN BE EVEN COLDER. SNOW AND ICE ARE COMMON. HERE'S HOW TO STAY SAFE AND WARM:

**Dress in Layers:** The key to dressing for winter is layering. Wear a moisture-wicking base layer (thermal underwear or even just a cotton t-shirt), then an insulating layer (like a sweater or fleece), and finally a windproof/waterproof outer layer (a good winter coat). Materials like wool or synthetic fabrics (polyester, etc.) are better than cotton as they keep warmth even if damp. Don't forget hat, gloves, and scarf.

A lot of body heat is lost through the head and neck – a warm hat (tuque) and a scarf to cover your neck (and even your lower face on very cold days) are important. Mittens (where your fingers are together) tend to keep hands warmer than gloves, but either is fine as long as insulated. On extremely cold or windy days, any exposed skin can get frostbite, so cover up as much as possible (use a scarf or face mask for your cheeks and nose, and ensure your ears are covered by a hat or earmuffs).

# WINTER SAFETY

- **Footwear:** Wear winter boots with a good grip. Boots should be insulated and preferably waterproof to keep your feet warm and dry. If your feet get wet, you'll feel much colder and could risk frostbite. Also, having sturdy boots helps prevent slips on snow or ice.
- **Stay Dry and Keep Moving:** If your clothing gets wet (from snow or sweat), it will make you cold. Change out of wet clothes promptly when you can. While outside, keep moving – movement generates body heat, so you'll feel warmer walking than standing still. If you have to wait for a bus, stomp your feet and swing your arms occasionally (it might look funny but it helps!).
- **Limit Time Outside in Extreme Cold:** When temperatures drop below  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  (especially with windchill, which is how cold the wind makes it feel), limit your time outdoors. If you must be out, take breaks to warm up indoors. Frostbite can occur on exposed skin in minutes at very low temps. Signs of frostbite include numb, pale, hard skin (often on fingers, toes, nose, ears). If you suspect it, get indoors and warm the area gently (not with hot water or fire – use body heat or lukewarm water).



# WINTER SAFETY

- **Check on Others:** Winter can be especially hard on seniors and those with disabilities or health issues. If you have a neighbor or friend who might need help, check on them during cold snaps. Also, never leave infants or pets alone in a cold car or outside without supervision; they are vulnerable to cold.
- **Winter Fun:** Not everything about winter is caution – it can be fun! Try making a snowman, go sledding (tobogganing) on a gentle hill, or if adventurous, learn to ice skate or ski. Embracing winter activities can make the season more enjoyable and help with the winter blues.



# SPRING SAFETY

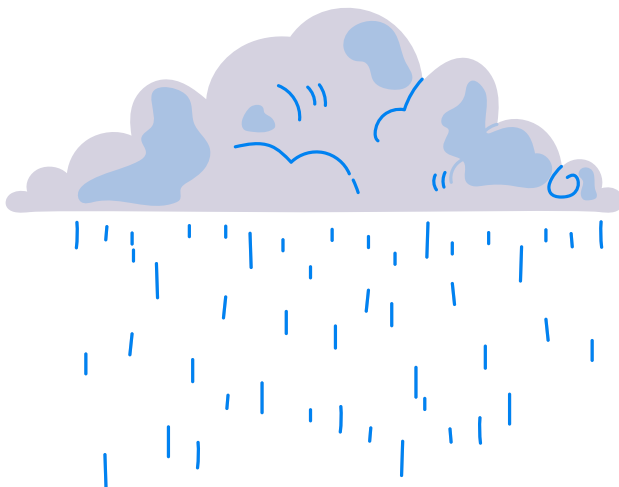
**SPRING (MARCH TO MAY) IN ONTARIO SEES WARMING TEMPERATURES, BUT ALSO A LOT OF VARIABILITY. EARLY SPRING CAN BE CHILLY AND WET; LATER SPRING IS MILDER. KEY POINTS FOR SPRING:**

**Flooding:** With snow melting and spring rains, some areas (especially near rivers) can experience floods. Follow local news; if there are flood warnings, avoid those areas. If you live in a flood-prone area (basement apartment in certain zones), consider some precautions like having valuables off the ground or checking if you need tenant insurance for floods. But for most, it's just being aware – do not drive through flooded roads (just a bit of water can stall your car or worse, sweep it away), and keep children away from fast-flowing swollen streams.

**Allergies:** Springtime can bring pollen as plants bloom. If you have hay fever, you might experience allergies here too. Over-the-counter antihistamines can help. Also, spring is tick season – in some areas (especially wooded or tall grass areas), ticks can carry Lyme disease. After hikes in nature, do a tick check (they're tiny bugs that latch onto skin). Wear long sleeves/pants and maybe insect repellent if in known tick zones.

# SPRING SAFETY

- **Unpredictable Weather:** Spring can swing between warm and cold. One day you're in a T-shirt, next day you need a light jacket. Dress in layers you can add or remove. Also, rain – you'll want an umbrella or waterproof jacket in spring as showers are frequent. Be careful driving in heavy rain, and watch out for pedestrians if you drive (spring is when more people start walking/biking again).
- **Thunderstorms:** Late spring can have thunderstorms. Generally, they're not severe, but if you hear thunder, it means lightning is possible – go indoors if possible. In open areas, avoid standing under tall isolated trees during lightning. Ontario gets very few tornadoes, but a few do occur mostly in summer. Just know the protocol: if you ever hear a tornado warning for your area (rare), go to a basement or interior room away from windows. But likely you'll never encounter one.



# SUMMER SAFETY

SUMMER (JUNE TO AUGUST) BRINGS HEAT AND HUMIDITY. TEMPERATURES CAN GO ABOVE 30°C, AND WITH HUMIDITY IT CAN FEEL MID-30S TO 40°C ON SOME DAYS. WHILE WE WELCOME THE WARMTH AFTER WINTER, HEAT CAN POSE RISKS TOO:

- **Sun Safety:** The sun's UV rays can be strong in summer. Wear sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher recommended) on exposed skin to prevent sunburn. Reapply it every few hours especially if sweating or swimming. Wearing a hat and sunglasses protects your face and eyes. Try not to leave kids or pets in parked cars even for a short time – cars can heat up dangerously fast.
- **Food safety:** In summer heat, food spoils faster. Be mindful at picnics or BBQs not to leave perishable food (like salads with mayonnaise or meat dishes) sitting out too long. Keep cold things cold (coolers with ice) and hot things hot. This prevents food poisoning.
- **Heat Waves:** During very hot periods (often called heat waves), drink plenty of water, even if you're not very thirsty. Dehydration and heat exhaustion are risks. Try to stay in the shade or indoors in the afternoon when it's hottest (especially vulnerable people like the elderly or those with health conditions). Many cities open cooling centers (often libraries, community centres) where people can go to cool off in air conditioning if they don't have AC at home.

# SUMMER SAFETY



- **Water Safety:** Summer is time for swimming! But always be cautious around water. If you're not a strong swimmer, wear a lifejacket when boating or at the beach. Even strong swimmers should not swim alone in unfamiliar waters. At public pools or lifeguarded beaches, follow the rules – they're there to keep you safe (like only swim in designated areas). Sadly, drownings do happen every year, often newcomers who aren't used to swimming in lakes or rivers. So, consider taking swimming lessons (many community centres offer adult learn-to-swim classes). And teach kids water safety early.
- **Emergency Storms:** Summer can bring thunderstorms and occasionally more severe weather. If there's a severe thunderstorm warning, secure loose items outside (wind can blow patio furniture). Power outages can happen if storms knock lines down. It's good to have flashlights and some bottled water on hand. Heat can also cause blackouts when everyone's running AC – so another reason to have an emergency kit.
- **Air Quality:** Sometimes in summer, especially if there are wildfires in the province or out west, the air quality can worsen (smoky haze). Check the Air Quality Health Index on hot days. If it's poor and you have breathing issues, limit strenuous outdoor activities. This has been more of an issue in recent years due to wildfires.
- **Insects:** Summer has mosquitoes (especially near dusk) – besides being annoying, they can carry West Nile virus. Use insect repellent with DEET if you're in a buggy area, or wear long sleeves/pants in evenings. There are also ticks in warmer months (as mentioned in spring). When hiking in woods or tall grass, use repellent and do tick checks. If a tick is attached to your skin, remove it carefully with tweezers and see a doctor to check (Lyme disease from tick bites is treatable if caught early).

# AUTUMN SAFETY

**FALL (SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER) IS GENERALLY MILD AND A FAVORITE SEASON FOR MANY DUE TO THE BEAUTIFUL CHANGING LEAVES AND CRISP AIR. IT'S RELATIVELY LOW RISK, BUT A FEW NOTES:**

- **Sun Safety:** The sun's UV rays can be strong in summer. Wear sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher recommended) on exposed skin to prevent sunburn. Reapply it every few hours especially if sweating or swimming. Wearing a hat and sunglasses protects your face and eyes. Try not to leave kids or pets in parked cars even for a short time – cars can heat up dangerously fast.
- **Food safety:** In summer heat, food spoils faster. Be mindful at picnics or BBQs not to leave perishable food (like salads with mayonnaise or meat dishes) sitting out too long. Keep cold things cold (coolers with ice) and hot things hot. This prevents food poisoning.
- **Heat Waves:** During very hot periods (often called heat waves), drink plenty of water, even if you're not very thirsty. Dehydration and heat exhaustion are risks. Try to stay in the shade or indoors in the afternoon when it's hottest (especially vulnerable people like the elderly or those with health conditions). Many cities open cooling centers (often libraries, community centres) where people can go to cool off in air conditioning if they don't have AC at home.

# AUTUMN (FALL) SAFETY

- **Adjusting to Cooler Weather:** After summer, temps drop. You might need jackets again by October. Dressing in layers is again useful because fall mornings/evenings can be chilly but afternoons warm. This season is the easiest to manage weather-wise, frankly.
- **School and Traffic:** Fall means shorter daylight. Be cautious as days shorten – it might be dark during your commute; ensure you're visible if walking or biking (wear reflectors or lights). With schools back in session, pay attention to school zones and school buses (in Ontario, if a school bus has flashing red lights, cars must stop – important rule to know to avoid hefty fines and keep kids safe).
- **Leaves and Rain:** Wet fallen leaves on sidewalks or roads can be slippery. So, while enjoying the foliage, just watch your step. Also, some yard work safety: if you're raking leaves, mind your back, use proper tools.
- **Halloween:** If you have kids, Halloween on Oct 31 is a big event – kids trick-or-treat after dark. If participating, ensure they have something reflective on costumes or carry a flashlight so drivers see them.
- **Flu Season:** Fall is the start of flu season. Ontario offers free flu shots (usually starting in October) – you can get them at pharmacies or clinics. It's a good idea to get one to protect yourself and those around you.

Overall, fall is a time to enjoy outdoors (hiking in the cooler weather is wonderful). Prepare for winter in fall (like get your furnace checked, buy winter gear before the snow hits to avoid rush).



# Emergency Preparedness

No matter the season, it's wise to have a basic emergency kit at home. This is for any natural disaster or major power outage. Your kit should include:

**Non-perishable food** (canned goods, dry foods) for at least 3 days for your household, and a manual can opener.

**Water** – 2 liters per person per day for 3 days (for drinking; additional for washing). So if 4 people, that's 24 liters stored.

**Flashlight** and extra batteries (or a hand-crank flashlight).

**Battery-powered or crank radio** to listen to news if power/internet is out.

**First aid kit** – bandages, antiseptic, any needed medications (have at least a week's supply of any prescription meds you rely on).

**Important documents** copies (IDs, insurance papers) sealed in a plastic bag.

**Cash** in small bills (ATMs might not work in a power outage).

**Emergency phone numbers** written down (in case your phone dies and you can't access contacts).

**Medications and basic toiletries** (toothpaste, etc.), and items for babies or pets if applicable (diapers, pet food).

# Emergency Preparedness

The Government of Canada's GetPrepared website has lists of recommended kit items. You don't have to assemble it all at once, but gradually ensure you have these things. Keep the kit in an easy-to-access spot (and let family know where). Also, have a family emergency plan: discuss where you'd meet if something happened (like if phone lines are down but you all evacuate to a certain friend's house or community center), and who is an out-of-town contact you all could message to check in.



# Emergency Preparedness

Ontario doesn't have large-scale disasters often (no hurricanes, small and infrequent tornados, minor risk of earthquakes in some areas but very infrequent). The most likely disruptions are winter storms knocking out power or heavy rain causing some flooding. In such cases, the municipal authorities will set up warming centers or shelters if needed and broadcast info on radio/TV. That's why a battery radio is handy, or use a car radio.

Know the emergency numbers: 911 for any life-threatening emergency (police, fire, ambulance). 211 for information on services (not an emergency line but in some crises they give info through 211). And 311 in many cities for municipal services (like if a tree fell on the road, etc.).

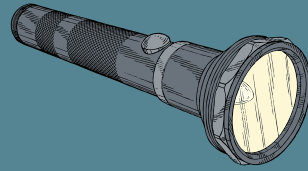


# Recap of Seasonal Strategies

- Winter: Bundle up, stay dry, watch for ice, have a car/home kit.
- Summer: Hydrate, use sunscreen and insect repellent, be storm-aware.
- Year-round: Keep an emergency kit, and adapt to weather reports (they're usually accurate within a day or two, so use that info).



# Reflection Activity



List three items you will include in your family's emergency kit (or that you want to check are in your kit). For each, note why it's important. For example:

- 1) Flashlight – in case of power outage at night, we need light.
- 2) Bottled water – if water supply is disrupted or unsafe, we have clean water to drink.
- 3) Battery radio – to get news if internet and TV are down.

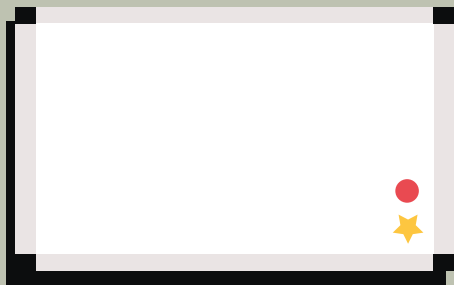
Then, describe how you plan to keep your family safe during extreme weather events. For instance, "During a winter storm, we'll stay indoors, keep taps slightly open to avoid pipes freezing, and use our stored food if needed" or "During a summer heat alert, we'll ensure to check on grandparents and stay in cool places." This exercise will help you mentally prepare for these situations.

(You can format the items as a checklist or simple list. And the safety plan as a few bullet points or sentences.)

# Case Question: Ahmed's First Canadian Winter

Ahmad has just moved to Ottawa in January from a tropical country. He has never experienced sub-zero temperatures or snow. What should he wear and how should he prepare for his first Canadian winter? (Outline advice for Ahmad: e.g., he should get a good winter coat, insulated boots, hat, gloves, scarf – essentially the layering and covering guidance.

Mention maybe to look for these items in thrift stores if budget is a concern, or newcomer clothing drives. Also advise him to learn safe winter habits: allow more travel time, be careful on ice, etc. Possibly encourage him to try a fun winter activity too, to appreciate the season rather than fear it. Give a comprehensive answer so Ahmad feels ready.)



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



*Raheen Fatima is a first-generation Canadian immigrant and an environmental author whose work focuses on the intersection of climate action and human well-being. She is committed to making information clear, supportive, and easy to understand, especially for people navigating new systems. She believes that when individuals are informed and confident, they are better able to care for themselves, their communities, and the planet.*



*As an immigrant who grew up in a remote Albertan town, Inaam Chattha understands how climate change, mental health and access to resources are deeply connected. He founded Green Mind Canada to create space for young people to talk about climate anxiety. He also wrote three children's books that help children understand climate emotions and feel empowered to act. He is an Ocean Wise ambassador.*