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ST. ANDREW'S SENIOR SOLUTIONS ENCOURAGES AREA RESIDENTS TO CHECK ON ELDERLY LOVED ONES AS DANGEROUS COLD WEATHER CONDITIONS PERSIST

ST. LOUIS, MO., JAN. X, 2010 . . . As old man winter's icy grip continues to plague the St. Louis region, St. Andrew's Senior Solutions is reminding area residents of the dangers that the bitterly cold temperatures can pose for the older adult population and encouraging them to take steps to ensure that their elderly loved ones remain safe, warm and out of harm's way during the current cold snap.

"Because they tend to lose body heat faster than the general population, older adults are far more vulnerable to hypothermia than younger individuals, and seniors don't have to be outdoors for problems to arise, particularly if they feel compelled to lower the thermostat to help prevent escalating heating costs," said Heather O'Brien, Eldercare Specialist with St. Andrew's Senior Solutions. "For the elderly in today's economic climate, such cost-saving measures are common, but they can be dangerous because even long-term exposure to mild cold indoors can bring on the symptoms of hypothermia. That's why it's so important for people with older adult family members to keep a close eye on their loved ones during these bitterly cold weather conditions."

According to MayoClinic.com, hypothermia is defined as a medical emergency that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce heat, causing a dangerously low body temperature that passes below 95 degrees. The symptoms of hypothermia are often subtle and slow to develop, making them difficult for older adults to recognize. Warning signs that may indicate the onset of hypothermia include sleepiness, confusion, cold hands and feet, shivering, pale skin, slurred or slow speech, slow or shallow breathing and clumsy or unsteady movements. Hypothermia can cause dehydration, confusion, irregular heartbeat, and if untreated, can result in coma or death.

To help individuals keep their elderly loved ones safe, St. Andrew's offers the following suggestions:

- Check daily on elderly friends, relatives and neighbors who live alone.
- Encourage elderly individuals to stay indoors as much as possible and keep at least one room in their homes heated to 70 degrees at all times.
- Ensure that older loved ones are dressed appropriately for the temperature of their homes – especially those with chronic diseases and those taking medications because certain medical conditions and medications can affect a senior's ability to gauge how cold they are. To stay warm, seniors should wear layers of clothing, even if they don't feel cold.
- Check to make sure seniors aren't overexerting themselves. Activities like shoveling snow can strain the heart.
- Make sure seniors are exercising caution when using fireplaces, woodstoves or space heaters. While these methods of alternative heating can save older adults money on their heating bills, they can pose dangers if not used properly.
- If you suspect that an older loved one is suffering from frostbite, hypothermia or other conditions related to the bitterly cold weather conditions, seek emergency care right away.

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St. Andrew's reminds residents of cold weather dangers for seniors

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“These suggestions seem very simple, but with nearly 600 individuals dying from hypothermia each year, they are tips that are critical for ensuring the health and safety of the senior population during the winter months,” said O’Brien. “Anyone who may be concerned about an elderly loved one, but may be unable to check on them in person, is encouraged to contact St. Andrew’s. Our organization employs a highly-skilled staff of eldercare professionals who can visit a senior’s home to ensure that they are warm and safe.”

To learn more about the dangers cold weather conditions can pose for seniors and ways you can help keep your older adult loved ones safe, contact St. Andrew’s Senior Solutions at (314) 726-5766.

St. Andrew’s Senior Solutions is a private, non-profit organization that is an affiliate of the St. Andrew’s Resources for Seniors System. Founded in 1961, the St. Andrew’s Resources for Seniors System is not-for-profit and provides housing, health, in-home care and supportive services, as well as services and assistance to the family caregivers of seniors. To learn more about St. Andrew’s Senior Solutions, call (314) 726-5766 or visit www.standrewsseniorsolutions.com.

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