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Baltimore weather: Code Blue prompts warnings from doctors



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PUBLISHED: January 15, 2026 at 2:31 AM EST | UPDATED: January 15, 2026 at 2:31 PM EST

A Code Blue extreme cold alert will be in effect in Baltimore from Thursday night into Friday morning as frigid temperatures and gusty winds are expected to drive wind chills below 13 degrees, prompting city agencies to coordinate emergency shelter and outreach services for those most vulnerable to the cold.

“Any time there is a Code Blue alert in effect, it means that people are at risk from injuries from the cold,” Dr. Cheyenne Falat, assistant medical director for the University of Maryland Medical Center’s Adult Emergency Department, told The Baltimore Sun. “We have already treated quite a few injuries in the past few weeks, including frostbite and hypothermia.”

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Code blue takes into effect wind chill, Falat said, as wind can increase potential for injury. It's very important to wear loose, layered clothing during freezing weather, including a warm hat, gloves and scarf, she added, as well as warm, preferably wool socks and dry, waterproof shoes.

Frostbite begins as a warmer, redder appearance in extremities like fingers, toes, ears or the nose, Falat said. If not remedied, this will progress to a tingling and later a throbbing sensation. Without treatment, affected areas may need to be amputated.

Hypothermia often begins with an elevated heart rate and shivering as your body tries to keep warm, Falat said. Once moderate hypothermia sets in, the opposite effect happens — heart rate, breathing and shivering will slow and eventually stop. Someone suffering hypothermia might appear uncoordinated or slur their speech. Without intervention this can result in a coma and death.

“Winter weather can pose serious health and safety risks, especially for older adults, infants, and individuals with chronic health conditions,” said Dr. Michelle Taylor, Baltimore health commissioner, in an news release. “Frostbite, hypothermia, and other cold-related injuries can occur more quickly than people realize. Please stay inside as much as possible, dress in warm layers, and call 311 for shelter information or assistance.”

Skies are likely to stay clear Thursday night as temperatures dip into the low 20s, with wind chills making it feel significantly colder.

Friday could bring some relief in terms of wind, with mostly sunny skies and highs in the upper-30s as breezes gradually shift to the south. Clouds are expected to increase Friday night, with temperatures hovering near freezing.

The weekend forecast suggests a more unsettled pattern.

On Saturday, temperatures are expected to climb into the mid-40s, with a chance of light, wintry precipitation in the morning transitioning to rain as the day progresses. Any lingering precipitation could mix with snow again overnight as temperatures fall into the upper -20s.

Sunday is shaping up to be colder, with highs in the mid-30s and a chance of snow during the first half of the day before skies begin to clear Sunday night.

Looking ahead to the holiday week, Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Tuesday are expected to remain dry but sharply colder, with daytime highs in the 20s and overnight lows dropping into the teens before a modest warmup returns by midweek.

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