

Winter 25-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



City of St. Louis Code Blue Plan

**A Unified Strategy to Provide Shelter and
Warming Opportunities through the Winter**

Winter 2025-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Purpose.....	3
1.2 Commitment to the City’s Most Vulnerable Populations.....	3
1.3 Executive Order 93.....	3
2. Seasonal Readiness and Operations.....	5
2.1 Pre-Season Readiness (August – October).....	5
2.2 Winter Operations (November – March).....	6
2.3 Post-Season Evaluation (April – July).....	6
3. Concept of Operations.....	8
3.1 Code Blue Operations.....	8
3.2 Activation Levels.....	9
3.3 Warming Operations.....	11
3.4 Roles and Responsibilities.....	12
4. Acronym List.....	14

Tables

Table 1: Code Blue Activation Process	9
Table 2: Agency and Department Roles and Responsibilities	12

Figures

Figure 1: Readiness and Operations Phases	5
---	---

Winter 2025-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



Executive Summary

The City of St. Louis declares Code Blue during periods of extreme cold to help safeguard residents who may be at greater risk from hazardous winter weather. This plan provides a high-level overview of how the City, and its partners prepare for and respond to dangerous cold conditions, including the framework established by Executive Order 93, the seasonal readiness approach, and the process used to determine when a Code Blue activation is warranted. Through coordinated monitoring, communication, and preparedness activities, City departments, the Continuum of Care (CoC), shelter providers, outreach teams, and community organizations work together to support residents throughout the winter season.

When temperatures or wind chill reach dangerous levels, the City may activate Code Blue to make warming operations and shelter resources more accessible. These supports—such as rally points, warming centers, warming buses, and overnight shelters—provide safe indoor spaces and temporary relief during extreme cold. Information about available locations and operating hours is shared through the City’s website and official communication channels. This plan provides the public with a clear understanding of how the City organizes Code Blue operations and collaborates with partners to reduce cold-related risks for residents.



1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The City of St. Louis Code Blue Plan outlines a coordinated approach to safeguard vulnerable residents during periods of extreme cold. It describes the role of the Winter Weather Unified Command (WWUC), activation criteria, and partnership responsibilities that guide how the City reduces cold-related risk throughout the winter season.

1.2 Commitment to the City's Most Vulnerable Populations

The City of St. Louis is committed to protecting residents who face greater risk during periods of extreme cold. This includes individuals experiencing homelessness, older adults, people with disabilities, families without reliable heat, and others who may struggle to stay warm or safely access resources. In coordination with community partners and service providers, the City aims to provide support to these residents and reduce the risks associated with dangerous winter weather.

1.3 Executive Order 93

Executive Order 93 establishes the City's authority to initiate and coordinate Code Blue operations during periods of dangerous cold. The Order designates the City Emergency Management Agency as the lead for winter weather coordination and authorizes the formation of the Winter Weather Unified Command (WWUC) to guide decision-making, communication, and resource alignment across City departments and partners.

Under this authority, the City may activate Code Blue, coordinate with community partners, and share public information related to cold-weather hazards and available warming resources. Executive Order 93 provides the framework that supports how the City organizes winter weather response activities throughout the season.

1.3.1 Winter Weather Unified Command (WWUC)

The WWUC is a coordination group established under the Executive Order to bring together City departments during significant winter weather events. Under this authority, the City may activate Code Blue, coordinate with community partners, and share public information related to cold-weather hazards and available warming resources. The WWUC helps ensure that departments share information, understand current conditions, and align their actions when extreme cold or hazardous weather affects the City.

During Code Blue activations, the WWUC supports decision-making, resource coordination, and communication among departments, including Emergency Management, Human Services, Health, Streets, Fire/EMS, and other agencies involved in winter operations. By working together through the WWUC, the City can coordinate

Winter 2025-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



services more effectively and provide consistent, timely support to residents during severe winter conditions.

2. Seasonal Readiness and Operations

The Seasonal Readiness and Operations framework outlines the activities the City will undertake to manage Code Blue activities across three distinct phases: Pre-Season Readiness, Winter Operations, and Post-Season Evaluations. This approach ensures proactive planning, coordinated response during severe cold weather, and comprehensive post-season assessment and activity refinement. Each phase includes key activities and prompts for partner input to confirm readiness and identify areas for improvement.

Figure 1: Readiness and Operations Phases



2.1 Pre-Season Readiness (August – October)

The pre-season readiness phase focuses on aligning partners, updating procedures, and confirming resources before winter weather risks emerge. During this period, City departments and Continuum of Care (CoC) partner organizations review lessons learned from the prior season, update protocols, and validate operational roles and resource commitments. Updates to procedures and readiness plans are completed by October 15 to support a smooth transition into winter operations. In alignment with Executive Order 93, the City also reviews and updates its winter weather procedures on an annual basis before the start of each winter season.

Pre-season coordination is a collaborative effort across City departments and partner organizations. Throughout this phase, partners:

- Review and refine operational roles
- Identify capacity for warming sites, shelter operations, outreach, and transportation
- Coordinate resource availability and identify gaps early
- Develop or refresh joint procedures and communication channels
- Participate in seasonal training or orientation activities to prepare for winter operations

This shared readiness approach strengthens coordination and supports a consistent winter posture as conditions move toward the start of the winter season.

2.2 Winter Operations (November – March)

Winter Operations encompass the City's season-long readiness posture during the November–March cold-weather period, with warming operations concentrated from December through March. Throughout this period, City departments and partner organizations maintain a steady state of monitoring, coordination, and preparedness to support timely action if conditions begin trending toward a Code Blue activation. This includes ongoing weather monitoring, maintaining updated resource inventories, verifying warming center and shelter readiness, and sustaining routine communication across agencies. Winter Operations serve as the foundation from which the City can scale into more active operational phases as conditions warrant.

During this season, the City maintains enhanced engagement with CoC organizations, contracted shelter operators, and other key partners to support shared situational awareness and confirm ongoing readiness. This includes routine check-ins to review shelter capacity, transportation availability, outreach coverage, accessibility considerations, and language access needs. Partners use this time to identify early gaps, share operational updates, and coordinate resources. This collaborative posture helps ensure that, if conditions shift toward a potential activation, the City and its partners remain aligned, informed, and prepared to scale operations effectively.

2.2.1 Mid-Operations Review

To support continuous improvement throughout the winter season, CEMA conducts a Mid-Operations Review to assess how Code Blue activities are functioning while operations are underway. This review may include high-level observations on shelter usage, warming operations, outreach demand, rally point effectiveness, staffing considerations, or other emerging needs.

Based on these observations, CEMA prepares a brief summary of findings for the WWUC and the Mayor's Office. This summary helps inform any adjustments needed to ensure that winter operations remain responsive to community needs and evolving weather conditions.

2.3 Post-Season Evaluation (April – July)

The post-season phase focuses on reviewing and strengthening Code Blue operations following the winter season. The goal is to identify lessons learned, assess performance across agencies and partners, and make improvements that support future winter readiness.

During this period, City departments and partner organizations provide feedback on operations such as public information, outreach, transportation, warming centers, shelters, and technology or intake systems. Partners also review factors such as

activation timelines, communication reach, accessibility considerations, and language access. Additionally, CEMA leads the development of an After-Action Review (AAR) process to document key strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. A collaborative review process is used to validate findings and identify priority actions for future winter seasons.

This ongoing evaluation supports continuous refinement of winter weather plans and strengthens coordination for the next winter season.

3. Concept of Operations

The Concept of Operations outlines how the City and its partners coordinate and scale activities during periods of extreme cold. This section describes the framework used to guide activation decisions, the conditions that may lead to a Code Blue, and the levels of response that align with varying degrees of weather severity. It provides a high-level overview of how monitoring, partner coordination, and resource adjustments work together to support residents when winter conditions become hazardous.

3.1 Code Blue Operations

Code Blue activations follow the framework established in Executive Order 93, which authorizes the City to declare a Code Blue when extreme cold poses a risk to public safety. Under EO 93, a Code Blue may be activated when ambient temperatures fall below 32°F or when wind chill drops below 25°F. These thresholds represent the minimum conditions under which a Code Blue may be declared.

To support coordinated winter operations, the City has expanded this framework into a set of four operational activation levels. These levels reflect increasing degrees of severity and help guide how City departments adjust readiness, outreach, warming operations, and resource coordination as conditions worsen. The four-level structure provides flexibility to respond to varying weather patterns and community needs throughout the winter season.

Winter 25-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



3.2 Activation Levels

The Code Blue activation process is designed to ensure a timely and scalable response to severe cold weather conditions, prioritizing the safety of vulnerable populations. The activation levels used in this plan provide a structure for how the City and its partners may adjust winter operations based on changing weather conditions. Each level includes minimum threshold conditions that help guide decisions about readiness and response. However, the City may activate at a higher level when conditions warrant, including circumstances such as expected precipitation, prolonged cold, limited shelter capacity, or other emerging risks.

The four activation levels offer a consistent framework for understanding how Code Blue operations may scale as weather conditions worsen, supporting timely and coordinated actions to help protect residents during periods of extreme cold.

Table 1: Code Blue Activation Process

Code Blue Activation Level	Conditions ¹	Operational Focus	Resources Activated
Level 1 – Steady State Activation (Standard Winter Operations)	December 1 – March 1	- Routine winter weather monitoring and situational awareness maintained - Preparations are maintained for a potential activation	- WWUC: Inactive - Baseline Beds: 400 - Surge Beds: 60 or more on standby - Transportation: Inactive - Warming Centers: Inactive
Level 2 – Limited Activation (Low Risk Code Blue)	- Temperatures below 32°F; or - Wind chill below 25°F	- Increased winter weather monitoring and situational awareness maintained - Enhanced public messaging - Increased community outreach and engagement efforts engaged	- WWUC: Partial activation - Baseline Beds: 400 - Surge Beds: 150 activated - Transportation: Inactive - Warming Centers: Select locations activated

¹ For Levels 2-4, weather conditions anticipated for 2 or more hours.

Winter 25-26 Code Blue Plan

Public Release



Code Blue Activation Level	Conditions ¹	Operational Focus	Resources Activated
<u>Level 3 – Partial Activation</u> (Moderate Risk Code Blue)	• Temperatures at or below 25°F; or • Wind chill below 10°F	• All focus areas included in Level 2 • Citywide Code Blue messaging deployed • Fully engaged community outreach and engagement efforts in place.	• WWUC: Partial activation • Baseline Beds: 400 • Surge Beds: up to 450 activated based on need • Rally Points: Locations activated across the City • Transportation: • Rally points activated as needed to support demand • Timed transportation circuits activated • Warming buses deployed strategically • Warming Centers: Additional locations activated across the City
<u>Level 4 – Full Activation</u> (High Risk Code Blue)	• Temperatures 10°F or below; or • Wind chill below -10°F	• All areas covered in Level 3 • Unified incident management across City departments • Mandatory hourly reporting • Fully engaged community outreach and engagement efforts in place	• WWUC: Full activation • Baseline Beds: 400 • Surge Beds: 600 activated • Rally Points: All locations activated • Transportation: • All rally points activated • Full transport fleet deployed • Warming buses at priority sites • Warming Centers: All locations activated

3.3 Warming Operations

Warming operations are an essential part of the City's efforts to reduce the risks associated with dangerous winter weather. By providing safe indoor spaces and coordinated support during periods of extreme cold, these operations help protect residents who may have limited access to reliable heat or shelter. Supporting warming operations during a Code Blue activation allows the City and its partners to offer short-term relief, strengthen outreach connections, and help vulnerable residents remain safe when cold conditions become hazardous.

Information about available warming operations will be posted on the City's website and shared through official City communication channels, including social media platforms such as X, Facebook, and Instagram. Information will be updated as needed throughout Code Blue activations.

3.3.1 Rally Points

Rally points are locations identified during a Code Blue activation where residents can connect with information and support during periods of extreme cold. These sites offer a consistent platform for outreach teams to connect with individuals, share available warming options, and guide residents to safe indoor spaces. Rally points are selected based on accessibility and proximity to areas where residents may already be located during cold-weather events.

3.3.2 Warming Centers and Warming Buses

Warming centers are short-term facilities activated during periods of extreme cold to provide temporary refuge and a safe, heated space for residents. These centers are typically open during daytime hours and are not designed to function as overnight shelters. Locations may include community centers, libraries, faith-based facilities, or other accessible sites identified by the City and partner organizations during a Code Blue activation.

In some situations, warming buses may also be used to provide immediate heated space, particularly in areas where indoor facilities are limited or where additional short-term capacity is needed. Warming buses remain stationary and offer a temporary place for individuals to stay warm while connecting with available cold-weather resources.

Operating hours and available amenities vary by activation and are shared publicly when warming centers or warming buses are in use.

3.3.3 Shelters

Shelters provide overnight accommodations for residents who need a safe place to stay during periods of extreme cold. These facilities are operated by community partners in coordination with the City and may serve different populations, including individuals,

families, older adults, and people with disabilities. Shelter locations, admission hours, and available services vary by provider and are shared publicly during each Code Blue activation.

Shelters generally operate during evening and overnight hours, typically opening around 6:00 PM and closing in the morning. During periods of severe winter weather, shelters may remain open for extended hours or operate continuously when conditions make travel unsafe or when additional warming options are limited. Any adjustments to hours are communicated during each activation.

Shelter availability may also expand during severe weather through additional beds or temporary sites offered by partner organizations. These options help increase capacity when conditions become hazardous, though amenities and services may differ by location. The City works with shelter providers and outreach partners to help connect residents with available shelter space during Code Blue events.

3.4 Roles and Responsibilities

A coordinated winter response relies on the combined efforts of City departments, community partners, and service providers. Each organization contributes within its area of expertise to support residents during periods of extreme cold. The following table outlines the general roles these partners play during Code Blue activations.

Table 2: Agency and Department Roles and Responsibilities

Organization	Responsibilities
CEMA	Coordinates overall winter weather readiness and supports Code Blue decision-making. CEMA helps ensure City departments and partners share timely information and maintain a common understanding of conditions throughout the winter season.
Department of Human Services (DHS)	Works with shelter and warming center operators to share updates on availability and hours. DHS collaborates with outreach partners to help connect residents with appropriate cold-weather resources.
Department of Health (DOH)	Provides public health guidance related to cold-weather risks and monitors health impacts associated with severe winter conditions. DOH also supports the communication of prevention information to help residents stay safe.
Fire Department	Supports outreach to vulnerable residents and provides emergency medical response and transport during extreme cold. The department also coordinates with other public safety partners when winter conditions increase community risk.
Streets Department	Conducts snow and ice management to maintain safe access to key facilities such as shelters, warming centers,

Organization	Responsibilities
	and rally points. The department works to prioritize routes that support travel and emergency operations during winter weather events.
Office of the Mayor	Shares public information and guidance during Code Blue activations and supports coordination among City departments and partners. The Mayor's Office also provides leadership messaging to help keep residents informed and reassured during hazardous winter weather.
CoC Organizations	Coordinates with shelter providers, outreach teams, and community partners to support shelter availability and real-time information sharing. The CoC helps ensure that services and locations are aligned with community needs during extreme cold.
Shelter & Warming Center Operators	Manage day-to-day operations at their respective sites, including hours, capacity, and available services. Operators share updates with the City and partners to help ensure residents can access safe indoor spaces during cold-weather events.
Outreach Teams	Engage individuals who may be at increased risk during extreme cold, share information about available warming options, and help connect residents to shelter resources. Outreach teams also provide on-the-ground awareness that supports overall winter response coordination.
United Way 211	Shares publicly available information on warming centers, shelters, and Code Blue resources. 211 responds to resident inquiries and helps connect callers with updated information provided by the City and partner organizations.

4. Acronym List

Term	Definition
AAR	After-Action Review
CEMA	City Emergency Management Agency
CoC	Continuum of Care
DHS	Department of Human Services
DOH	Department of Health
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
WWUC	Winter Weather Unified Command