

Frostbite warning put shelters on alert

Warmer weather on its way

By Zev Singer, Ottawa Citizen With Files From Mark Brownlee
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OTTAWA — With the city in the deep freeze, Ottawa Public Health issued a frostbite warning Tuesday. Staff at the city's homeless shelters knew what that meant: extra efforts to ensure the most vulnerable get out of the cold.

Temperatures through the day and night were around the -20 C mark, with a wind chill knocking it down about another 10 degrees. It's the type of weather that can lead to skin damage through exposure, prompting the city's public health department to remind people to pile on many layers of clothing.

Shirley Roy, spokeswoman for the Mission, one of the city's big homeless shelters, said staff take special care when this type of weather hits. "We are extra vigilant about our front-line staff doing walkabouts outside the perimeter (of the shelter). They go looking to make sure people know they can go inside," she said. "They make sure people aren't sitting outside for too long, especially those who are vulnerable - whether it be mental illness or addiction - and tell them to go in and warm up."

She said the shelter provides warm clothing for those without.

"We get daily requests for gloves and hats and coats and boots," she said, adding that quite a few donations came in around Christmas time.

"If (the extreme cold) lasts much longer we'll have to make a plea for donations again," Roy said.