

Heat Pump Defrost Cycle Quick Guide

What the cycle does, what is normal to see, and when to ask for help

What the cycle does

1 Clears frost from the outdoor coil

The system briefly reverses itself so warm refrigerant melts ice off the coil surface.

2 Runs only when frost builds up

Frequency changes with outdoor humidity and temperature rather than following a fixed schedule.

3 Returns to normal heating on its own

A complete cycle ends by itself and the system goes back to steady heating.

What is normal to notice

1 A brief pause or change in fan sound

The outdoor fan may slow or stop for a few minutes during the cycle.

2 Steam or light mist outside

This is melted frost evaporating in cold air and typically clears quickly.

3 Slightly cooler air indoors for a short time

Some systems add a small amount of backup heat automatically to reduce this.

Questions to ask a technician

1 Ask about your model's defrost sensor

Find out whether your system uses a timer, a coil sensor, or both to decide when to defrost.

2 Ask about backup heat during defrost

Confirm whether your system runs supplemental heat automatically during the cycle.

3 Ask what a stuck cycle looks like

Have a technician describe the specific signs for your equipment so you know what to watch for.

Keep this guide handy the next time you catch your heat pump steaming in the driveway. Most of the time, it just means the system is doing exactly what it should.

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