

December 16, 2019



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"For Safety's Sake - Do Something"

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Exposure to Cold Temperatures

When winter temperatures drop significantly below normal, staying warm and safe can become a challenge. Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outside, can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected.

Eating well-balanced meals help you stay warmer. Drinking alcoholic and caffeinated beverages causes the body to lose heat more quickly. Instead, drinking warm, sweet beverages or broth can help maintain body temperatures. If you have any dietary restrictions, ask your doctor.

Wearing proper clothing outdoors is important in the winter. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss. Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing holds more body heat than cotton. Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm.

In the cold, your body loses heat faster than it produces. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy, which can cause hypothermia.

Hypothermia can affect the brain making a victim unable to think clearly or move well. It is particularly dangerous because a person may not know what is happening. Hypothermia is most common at very cold temperatures, however, it can occur at cool temperatures, or those above 40 degrees F, if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

Frostbite is an injury to the body that causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation and among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures.

If you notice any of these signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95° F, the situation is an emergency—get medical attention immediately.

If medical care is not available, begin warming the person as follows:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- If the victim has on any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first—chest, neck, head, and groin—using an electric blanket, if available. You can also use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.

A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious, may not seem to have a pulse, or may appear not to be breathing. In this case, handle the victim gently, and get emergency assistance immediately.

- Even if the victim appears dead, CPR should be provided. CPR should continue while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical aid becomes available. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.