

WINTER HEALTH and SAFETY TIPS

The mention of winter evokes images of sparkling snowflakes and skaters gracefully gliding across the ice. But winter can also be a time of illness and injury, if people fail to take adequate health and safety precautions.

Dressing for the Cold

Westerners usually forget or don't take seriously the effect of cold temperatures on their body. Don't wait until you have been treated for frostbite to realize the damaging effect. Bundle-up well, using layers of clothing, keep exposed body parts to a minimum, using gloves, hats and scarves. Remember infants and children are particularly vulnerable to cold and can't express their discomfort.

Cold Weather Conditions

Low temperatures, especially combined with strong winds, can lead to frost nip and frostbite and in extreme cases, hypothermia.

Frost nip is a relatively minor reaction to the cold. It happens when ice crystals form under the skin. It is usually not painful and is easy to treat.

Signs and symptoms: coldness in extremities: cheeks, nose, ears, fingers, toes, hands and feet.

Treatment: rub area or blow air onto it.

Frostbite happens when soft tissue freezes. It is a particular danger on days with a high wind chill factor. If not properly treated, frostbite can lead to the loss of tissues or even limbs.

Signs and symptoms: swelling and redness at first, tingling and burning of extremities, numbness or partial paralysis, waxy white skin as frostbite progresses, skin may feel hard.

Treatment: put frozen area in warm (not hot) water for 30 minutes; if no water available, hold between two warm hands (do not rub). After area is warm, bandage it and keep it raised. Do not use a hot water bottle or put area near hot stove. Seek medical help in all but most mild cases.

Hypothermia is the most severe form of cold-related injury. It is defined as a body temperature of less than 35°C or 95°F. Hypothermia is a major danger because the symptoms come on so gradually that many victims and their co-workers don't notice them until it's too late. While generally not a concern in daily activities, knowledge of signs and symptoms and treatment may be important during prolonged outdoor work or winter excursions or field trips.

Signs and symptoms: body temperature of less than 35°C (95°F), drowsiness, slurred speech, irritability and combativeness, impaired coordination, weakness and lethargy and cool skin.

Treatment: remove victim from the source of cold and shelter from cold and wind; replace wet clothes with dry ones immediately; warm the person with reflected heat from a stove or campfire; wrap victim in blankets and huddle under them with victim; cover head; give warm, sweet, non-alcoholic drinks if victim is conscious; look for signs that you should start artificial respiration and CPR; don't use direct heat, electric blankets, or hot water bottles; don't massage skin; don't give drugs, alcohol, or tobacco; don't walk victim around; don't assume victim is dead, even if you can't detect breathing or a pulse – start CPR; seek medical care immediately.

Winter Health

- If your child suffers from winter nosebleeds, try using a cold air humidifier in the child's room at night. Saline



nose drops or petrolatum may help keep tissues moist. If bleeding is severe or recurrent, consult your pediatrician.

- Many pediatricians feel that bathing two or three times a week is enough for an infant's first year. More frequent baths may dry out the skin, especially during the winter.
- Cold weather does not cause colds or flu. But the viruses that cause colds and flu tend to be more common in the winter, when children are in school and are in closer contact with each other. Frequent hand washing and teaching your child to sneeze or cough into the bend of her elbow may help reduce the spread of colds and flu.
- Children 6 months of age and up should get the influenza vaccine to reduce their risk of catching the flu.

Winter Sports and Activities

- Set reasonable time limits on outdoor play to prevent hypothermia and frostbite. Have children come inside periodically to warm up.

Ice Skating

- Allow children to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local police or recreation departments, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved.
- Advise your child to:
 - Skate in the same direction as the crowd
 - Avoid darting across the ice
 - Never skate alone
 - Not chew gum or eat candy while skating.
- Consider having your child wear a helmet while ice skating.

Sledding

- Keep sledders away from motor vehicles.
- Children should be supervised while sledding.
- Keep young children separated from older children.
- Sledding feet first or sitting up, instead of lying down head-first, may prevent head injuries.
- Consider having your child wear a helmet while sledding.
- Use steerable sleds, not snow disks or inner tubes.
- Sleds should be structurally sound and free of sharp edges and splinters, and the steering mechanism should be well lubricated.
- Sled slopes should be free of obstructions like trees or fences, be covered in snow not ice, not be too steep (slope of less than 30°), and end with a flat runoff.
- Avoid sledding in crowded areas.

Snow Skiing and Snowboarding

- Children should be taught to ski or snowboard by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children.
- Never ski or snowboard alone.
- Young children should always be supervised by an adult. Older children's need for adult supervision depends on their maturity and skill. If older children are not with an adult, they should always at least be accompanied by a friend.
- Consider wearing a helmet.
- Equipment should fit the child. Skiers should wear safety bindings that are adjusted at least every year. Snowboarders should wear gloves with built-in wrist guards. Eye protection or goggles should also be used.
- Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder. Avoid crowded slopes.
- Avoid skiing in areas with trees and other obstacles.



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Prevention of Cold Weather Injuries Before They Happen

You can prevent cold weather injuries before they happen:

- Dress appropriately. Layers of clothing are best; e.g., two shirts, two pairs of socks, etc. Rain gear or waterproof gear as the top layer will keep the warmer clothing dry. Wool is good, as is clothing that allows sweat to escape.
- Always cover the most vulnerable areas – i.e., ears (hat, headband or earmuffs) and hands (gloves or mittens).
- On extremely cold days avoid being outside unnecessarily. Check bus schedules and check if buildings are open before dropping children at schools or daycare centers.
- When outdoors, keep physically active. If the wind is strong, seek protection from the wind.
- Drink lots of fluids, but not alcohol, while working.
- Be vigilant about the wind-chill.
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Yours in health,

AAS Medical Staff