

Hypothermia

Hypothermia develops when an individual is exposed to severe cold without sufficient protection. The condition, which is potentially fatal, occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Victims of hypothermia are often (1) elderly people with inadequate food, clothing, or heating; (2) babies sleeping in cold bedrooms; (3) people who remain outdoors for long periods—the homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.; and (4) people who drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.

Observable symptoms in someone developing hypothermia include: poor coordination, slurred speech, irrationality, blueness or puffiness of the skin, dilation of the pupils, decreased respiratory rate, and a weak or irregular pulse.

Avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages as they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly. While alcoholic beverages may make the drinker feel warm, they actually interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. Someone showing signs of mental confusion could be mistaken for being intoxicated when he or she is actually exhibiting symptoms of hypothermia.

Dressing warmly, eating enough food, drinking plenty of fluids and staying as active as possible are good ways to maintain body heat and avoid hypothermia.

Frostbite

Frostbite is another hazard experienced in extremely cold weather. The onset of frostbite is usually characterized by a sharp pricking sensation and numbness but body tissue may freeze without awareness of numbness or pain. Just before freezing, the skin turns a bright red. Frostbite most commonly affects the feet. If frostbite occurs, running warm water over the affected area is the recommended treatment (if re-exposure is not expected).

Proper clothing is essential to protection from frostbite. Multiple layers of clothing are better than just one, because they provide better insulation and can be removed or added as needed. The key is to make certain there are no areas of skin exposed to the frigid air.

Children who want to go out and play in the snow should periodically come indoors to warm up and dry off. Dress them with layers of clothing and be sure to cover ears, fingers and toes. Parents should avoid taking infants outdoors when the temperature is below freezing because infants lose body heat quickly.

People who must work outdoors in extreme cold weather should try to do so during the warmest part of the day. Take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to allow your body to warm up while working in the cold. Select the proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions. Layer clothing to adjust for changing temperatures. Wear a hat and gloves, as well as thermal underwear with a material such as polypropylene to help wick the moisture away from the skin. If you are working in the cold and notice signs of cold injury, i.e. numbness and pain in extremities, stop working and get to a warm shelter to warm your body up. Frostbite is a medical emergency. If frostbite has set in, get medical treatment immediately.

For more information on how to stay healthy and safe in extreme cold, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>
<<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>> .

* DPH Cold Weather Tips: www.ct.gov/dph/coldweather