

Surviving the Cold Weather

Prolonged exposure to low temperatures, wind and/or moisture can result in cold-related injury from frostbite and hypothermia.

Dress properly

Wear several layers of thick, loose-fitting clothing to insulate your body by trapping warm, dry air inside. Loosely woven cotton and wool clothes best trap air and resist dampness..

The head and neck lose heat faster than any other part of the body. Your cheeks, ears and nose are the most prone to frostbite. Wear a hat, scarf and turtleneck sweater to protect these areas.

Frostbite: What to look for

The extent of frostbite is difficult to judge until hours after thawing. There are two classifications of frostbite:

- Superficial frostbite is characterized by grey or yellowish patches on the affected areas. The skin remains soft and pliable, but becomes red and flaky after thawing.
- Deep frostbite is characterized by waxy and pale skin, the affect parts feel cold, hard, and solid which may turn blue or purple upon thawing. Large blisters may also appear after rewarming.

What to do

1. Get the victim out of the cold and to a warm place immediately.
2. Remove any constrictive clothing items that could impair circulation.
3. If you notice signs of frostbite, seek medical attention immediately.
4. If a body part is partially thawed, place frostbitten part in warm water (102 to 106 degrees Fahrenheit). If you do not have a thermometer, test the water first to see if it is warm. Rewarming usually takes 20 to 40 minutes or until tissues soften.

What not to do

1. Do not use water hotter than 106 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Do not use water colder than 100 degrees Fahrenheit since it will not thaw frostbite quickly enough.
3. Do not rub or massage the frostbite area.
4. Do not rub with ice or snow.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses more heat than it produces. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, impaired speech and clumsy movements. Severe hypothermia may cause rigid muscles, dark and puffy skin, irregular heartbeat and respiration, and unconsciousness.

Treat hypothermia by protecting the victim from further heat loss and seeking immediate medical attention. Carefully remove the victim's clothing if it is wet, but avoid rubbing the victim's skin.

