



Cold Weather

Cold Weather Can Kill

Cold weather is more than just an inconvenience. It can be dangerous and even deadly. Luckily, our bodies have a number of ways of signaling that cold temperatures are creating dangerous conditions, and we know the steps to take to keep a cold-weather tragedy from happening.

FROSTBITE

Frostbite comes from exposure to extremely cold temperatures. It's usually associated with fingers and toes, but also is common on ears, noses, cheeks and chins. It is a serious injury that can lead to permanent tissue damage and amputation.

The first sign of frostbite is unusual skin redness. If exposure to cold continues, numbness sets in, and the skin may turn white or gray-looking and feel waxy or unusually firm. You might not even realize you have frostbite because the area is numb.

FROSTBITE DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DO** seek medical care immediately. Frostbite is a serious injury.
- **DO** get into a warm room and immerse the affected area in lukewarm water (99-104° F or 37-40° C) for 20 to 30 minutes only if medical care will be delayed and if there is no danger of the skin refreezing.
- **DO** remove wet clothing and constricting items, and protect between fingers and toes with dry gauze.
- **DO** warm the extremity with your own body heat: for example, hold frostbitten fingers under your arm.
- **DO** protect and elevate the affected area.
- **DON'T** rub the frostbitten area with snow.



- **DON'T** massage the frostbitten area or walk on frostbitten toes to avoid further tissue damage.
- **DON'T** use a heating pad, heat lamp, hot water or other high-temperature heat sources to warm the skin.
- **DON'T** use chemical warmers directly on frostbitten tissue.

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia is caused by prolonged exposure to low temperatures or cold water. Hypothermia can start in temperatures as high as 40°F if you are chilled from rain, sweat or being submerged in water. Your internal body temperature



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gets too low because your body loses heat faster than it can be produced. When your body temperature gets too low, your brain is affected, and you may not be able to think clearly or move well. This is especially dangerous because you might be unable to make good decisions about getting out of the situation that is causing hypothermia. Other signs of hypothermia are bright red, cold skin, shivering, exhaustion, drowsiness, memory loss and slurred speech.

HYPOTHERMIA DO'S AND DON'TS

- **DO** take the victim's temperature and if it is 95°F or below, get medical attention immediately.
- **DO** get the victim into a warm room and give warm, nonalcoholic beverages. Don't give beverages if the victim is unconscious.
- **DO** remove wet clothing.
- **DO** warm the center of the victim's body first — head, neck and torso — with an electric blanket, layers of blankets, or skin-to-skin contact.
- **DON'T** rub or massage the victim's skin. Be very gentle when handling the victim.
- **DON'T** assume an unconscious victim is dead. If the victim is unconscious and appears not to have a pulse or be breathing, call emergency medical services and give CPR while the victim is being warmed. Victims of hypothermia are often successfully resuscitated.

For both of these injuries, it's often a co-worker or family member who notices something is wrong before you do. Don't be afraid to say, "You look bright red, let's get out of this weather for a bit" or "Can we go somewhere warm? My toes feel numb." That's how we can keep each other safe from frostbite and hypothermia.

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