

Preventing Hypothermia

Source: CDC

How to recognize hypothermia and what to do when someone is dangerously cold: warning signs in adults and babies, who is most at risk, how to warm a person safely, and when to start CPR.

READ WITH CARE

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<https://www.cdc.gov/winter-weather/prevention/index.html>

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Preventing Hypothermia

Key points

- Hypothermia (abnormally low body temperature) is a dangerous condition that can happen when a person is exposed to extremely cold temperatures.
- Stay safe this winter by learning more about hypothermia, including who is most at risk, signs and symptoms, and what to do if someone develops hypothermia.

Overview

Stay safe this winter by learning more about hypothermia, including who is most at risk, signs and symptoms, and what to do if someone develops hypothermia.

What is hypothermia?

- Hypothermia can happen when a person is exposed to very cold temperature for a long period of time. When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it's produced. Lengthy exposures will eventually use up your

body's stored energy, which leads to lower body temperature.

- Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia especially dangerous, because a person may not know that it's happening and won't be able to do anything about it.
- While hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, it can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

Risk factors

Victims of hypothermia are often:

- Older adults with inadequate food, clothing, or heating
- Babies sleeping in cold bedrooms
- People who remain outdoors for long periods—people experiencing homelessness, hikers, hunters, etc.
- People who drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.

What to look out for

The following are warnings signs of hypothermia:

Adults

- Shivering
- Exhaustion or feeling very tired
- Confusion
- Fumbling hands
- Memory loss
- Slurred speech
- Drowsiness

Babies

- Bright red, cold skin
- Very low energy

Don't wait— take action

Avoid, spot, treat frostbite & hypothermia.

In cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced, which can lead to serious health problems.

Avoid

When the weather is extremely cold, try to stay indoors. If you must go outside, dress properly and know who is at high risk for hypothermia or frostbite. When going outside be sure to wear: a scarf or knit mask that covers face and mouth; a hat; mittens or gloves; a water-resistant coat; water-resistant boots; and several layers of loose-fitting clothing.

When going outside in winter make sure body parts most often affected by frostbite are covered in warm, dry clothing: nose, ears, toes, cheeks, chin, and fingers.

Know who is at high risk: older adults without proper food, clothing, or heating; people who stay outdoors for long periods (homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.); people who drink alcohol in excess or use illicit drugs; and babies sleeping in cold rooms.

Spot

Frostbite

A victim is often unaware of frostbite because frozen tissue is numb.

Signs & Symptoms: Redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign of frostbite.

Other signs include: a white or grayish-yellow skin area; skin that feels unusually firm or waxy; and numbness

Hypothermia

Hypothermia often occurs at very cold temperatures, but can occur at cool temperatures (above 40 degrees Fahrenheit), if a person is wet (from rain, sweat, or cold water) and becomes chilled.

Signs & Symptoms

Adults: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness.

Infants: bright red, cold skin, and very low energy.

If a person's temperature is below 95 degrees get medical attention immediately.

Treat

If a person is experiencing hypothermia or frostbite...

- 1) Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- 2) Get them into a warm room or shelter.

- 3) Remove any wet clothing.
- 4) Warm them under dry layers of blankets and clothing.
- 5) Place areas affected by frostbite in warm-to-touch water.

Frostbite Caution

Since skin may be numb, victims of frostbite can harm themselves further. Use caution when treating frostbite and:

- 1) Unless necessary, do not walk on feet or toes with frostbite.
- 2) Do not use a fireplace, heat lamp, radiator, or stove for warming.
- 3) Do not use a heating pad or electric blanket for warming.
- 4) Do not rub or massage areas with frostbite.

Download Infographic

Hypothermia is a medical emergency. If you notice any of the above signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95° F, get medical attention immediately!

If you are not able to get medical help

right away, try to warm the person up.

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing the person is wearing.
- Warm the center of the person's body—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 drinks can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic drinks. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrap their body, including their head and neck, in a warm blanket.
- Get the person proper medical attention as soon as possible.

Severe hypothermia

A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing.

- In this case, handle the person gently, and get emergency assistance immediately.
- Perform CPR, even if the person appears dead. CPR should continue until the person responds or medical aid becomes available. Keep warming the person while performing CPR. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

Resources

- Natural Disasters and Severe Weather
- Winter Weather | Ready.gov
- Winter Storm Preparedness & Blizzard Safety | Red Cross
- Winter (weather.gov)

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