

# Tips to protect yourself during cold weather

When winter temperatures drop significantly below normal, staying warm and safe can become a challenge, says the Center for Disease Control. Extremely cold temperatures often accompany a winter storm, so you may have to cope with power failures and icy roads. Although staying indoors as much as possible can help reduce the risk of car crashes and falls on the ice, you may also face indoor hazards.

fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful. Follow the manufacturer's instructions and remember these safety tips:

- Use fireplace, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.
- Do not burn paper in a fireplace.
- Ensure adequate ventilation if you must use a kerosene heater.
- Use only the type of fuel your heater is designed to use - don't substitute.
- Do not place a space heater within three feet of anything that may catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding, and never cover your space heater.

- Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- Never leave children unattended near a space heater.
- Make sure that the cord of an electric space heater is not a tripping hazard but do not run the cord under carpets or rugs.
- Avoid using extension cords to plug in your space heater.
- If your space heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, do not use it.

- Store a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- Protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning by installing a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector and never using generators, grills, camp stoves, or similar devices indoors.

#### Conserve heat

You may need fresh air coming in for your heater or for emergency cooking arrangements. However, if you don't need extra ventilation, keep as much heat as possible inside your home. Avoid unnecessary opening of doors or windows. Close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or

rags in cracks under doors, and close draperies or cover windows with blankets at night.

#### Dress warmly and stay dry when going outdoors

Adults and children should wear:

- a hat
- a scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth
- sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- water-resistant coat and boots
- several layers of loose-fitting clothing

Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind. Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Stay dry - wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Also, avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing and fueling your car or using a snow blower. These materials in contact with the skin greatly increase heat loss from the body. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

Serious health problems can result from prolonged exposure to the cold. The most common cold-related are hypothermia and frostbite.

#### Hypothermia

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the

victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.

Hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, but it can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

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.

#### Recognizing hypothermia

Warnings signs of hypothermia:

Infants:

- bright red, cold skin
- very low energy

Adults:

- shivering, exhaustion
- confusion, fumbling hands
- memory loss, slurred speech
- drowsiness

What to do  
If you notice any of these signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95°, the situation is an emergency - get medical attention immediately.

If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, as follows:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- If the victim has on any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first - chest, neck, head, and groin - using an electric blanket, if available. Or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages.

Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.

- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.

- Get medical attention as soon as possible.

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 victim gently, and get emergency assistance immediately. Even if the victim appears dead, CPR should be provided. CPR should continue while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical aid becomes available. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

#### Frostbite

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation and among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures.

#### Recognizing frostbite

At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin - frostbite may be beginning. Any of the following signs may indicate frostbite:

- a white or grayish-yellow skin area
- skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- numbness

A victim is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb.

What to do

If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care. Because frostbite and hypothermia both result from exposure, first determine whether the victim also shows signs of hypothermia, as described previously. Hypothermia is a more serious medical condition and requires emergency medical assistance.

If (1) there is frostbite but no sign of hypothermia and (2) immediate medical care is not available, proceed as follows:

- Get into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes - this increases the damage.

- Immerse the affected area in warm - not hot - water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).

- Or, warm the affected area using body heat.

For example, the heat of an armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers.

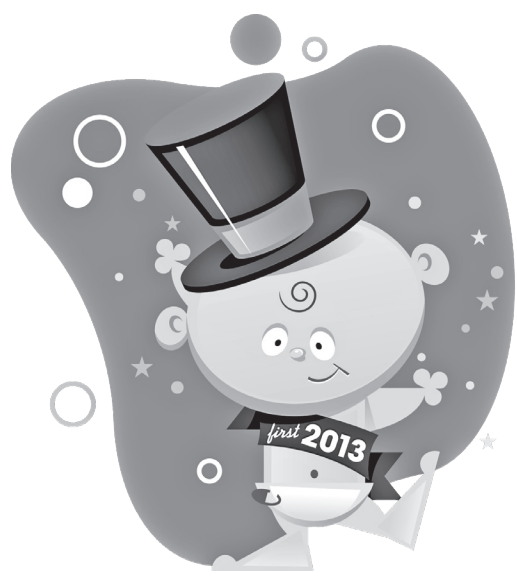
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it at all. This can cause more damage.

- Don't use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

These procedures are not substitutes for proper medical care. Hypothermia is a medical emergency and frostbite should be evaluated by a health care provider. It is a good idea to take a first aid and emergency resuscitation course to prepare for cold-weather health problems.

Knowing what to do is an important part of protecting your health and the health of others.

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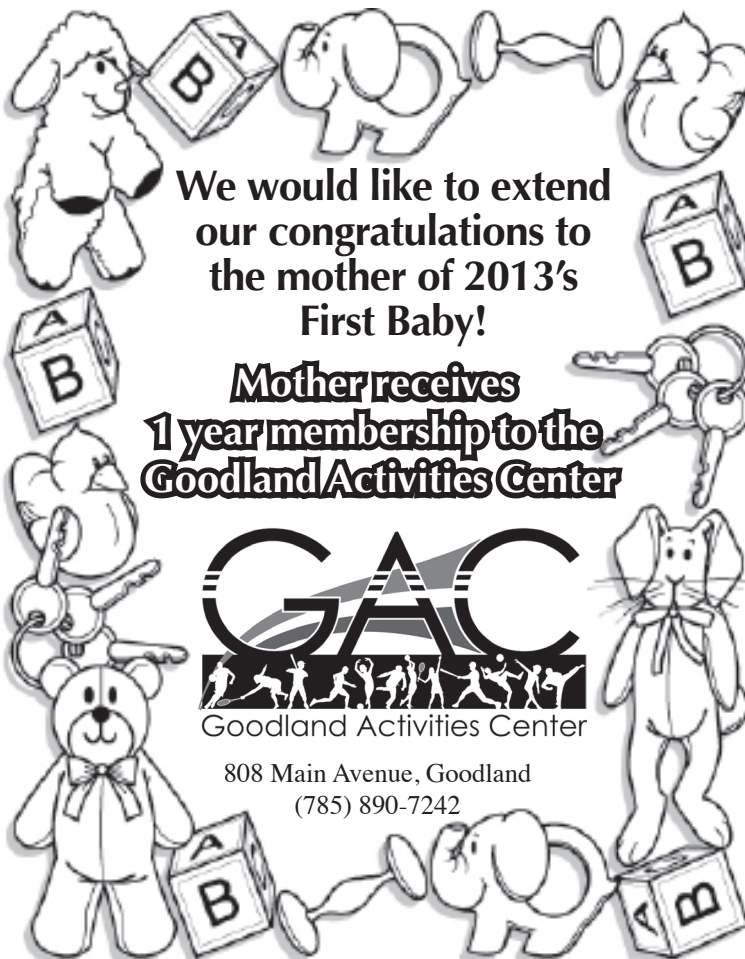
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