

Winter Weather: Outdoor Safety

Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outdoors, can cause serious or life-threatening health problems. To keep yourself and your family safe ensure you are prepared.

Dress Warmly and Stay Dry

Adults and children should wear:

- A hat and a scarf (or knit mask) to cover face and mouth
- Mittens (are warmer than gloves)
- Water-resistant coat and boots
- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing. Inner layers of clothing made from wool, silk or polypropylene retains more body heat than cotton.
- Tightly woven (preferably wind resistant) outer layer of clothing reduces body-heat loss caused by wind

Stay dry, wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will also increase heat loss. Therefore when you feel too warm, remove some of the extra layers of clothing.

And do not ignore shivering - It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors

Outdoor Safety

You can avoid cold-related injuries by following these additional cold weather safety tips:

- Dress warmly and cover exposed skin. Frost bite can occur in as little as 30 seconds.
- Wear clothes in layers: inner layer, middle layer and outer layer. If you start to sweat, cool off a little as wet clothes can freeze.
- Keep children indoors if the temperature falls below -25°C , or if the wind chill is -28°C or greater. (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2009)
- Keep moving. Limit time sitting – stand up and move around.
- Take shelter from the wind – this will reduce wind chill exposure.
- Always be alert for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Drink warm fluids – but NOT caffeinated or beverages containing alcohol as they cause your body to lose heat more rapidly.
- Plan ahead – listen to the weather forecast and be prepared.

Travel Safely

- Listen to the radio or television for travel advisories.
- Do not travel when visibility is poor.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, overpasses, and bridges.
- If you must travel take a mobile phone with you and let someone know your destination and when you expect to arrive.
- Ensure you have a winter emergency kit in your car before you leave.
- Never pour water on your windshield to remove ice or snow; shattering may occur.
- Don't rely on a car to provide sufficient heat; the car may break down.
- Always carry additional warm clothing appropriate for the winter conditions with you.

Your Health and Cold Weather

Condition	Cause	Symptoms	Prevention
Frostnip	Mild form of frostbite where only the skin freezes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skin appears yellowish or white. ▪ Skin feels soft to the touch. ▪ Experience painful tingling or burning sensation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Warm the area gradually using a warm hand or warm heat. ▪ Do not rub the area and avoid using direct heat which can burn the skin. ▪ Once the area is warm do not re-expose it to the cold.
Frostbite	<p>Most commonly affects the hands, legs, and fingers and can lead to serious health complications.</p> <p>If you experience any of the symptoms listed, seek medical attention immediately for frostbite!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pale grey, waxy textured skin in affected area (cold to the touch). ▪ Numbness and localized pain. ▪ Swelling and blistering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not rub or massage the affected area; that can cause more damage. ▪ Warm up the area slowly with warm compresses or use your own body to re-warm the area (e.g. use your underarms to warm the hand of the opposite limb). ▪ If toes or feet are frostbitten, try not to walk on them.
Hypothermia	<p>Occurs when the body's normal temperature becomes too low (less than 35°C).</p> <p>If you experience any of the symptoms listed, seek medical attention immediately!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shivering, confusion and/or weakness. ▪ Mumbling, stumbling, and/or fumbling. ▪ Pale skin colour (for infants, look for cold reddish skin and low energy). <p>Symptoms may be subtle in older persons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gently remove wet clothing and get the person to a warm place as soon as possible. ▪ Use several layers of blankets and warm the person gradually. ▪ If the person is alert, give warm beverages, do not give alcohol.
Winter Asthma	Asthma may be triggered because there's an increased chance for respiratory infections and the air may be cold and dry.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hand wash often to stop the spread of germs. ▪ Wear a scarf loosely over the mouth and nose. ▪ Breathe through the nose when outdoors. This helps warm and humidify the air before it reaches the lungs. ▪ Keep rescue inhalers close by and in a warm place. Use controller medication consistently; follow your asthma action plan.

Where can I find more information?

For more information and to speak to a public health professional call *Your Health Connection* Monday to Friday at 721-7520 (1-877-721-7520) and review the following resources.

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit: www.simcoemuskokahealth.org
 Extreme Cold Fact Sheet, Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Fact Sheet

Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov

Environment Canada: www.ec.gc.ca