

Cold Weather: Outdoor Safety

Extreme cold occurs when temperatures drop significantly below average for that time of the year. Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outside, can cause other serious or life-threatening health problems. To keep yourself and your family safe, you should know how to prevent cold-related health problems and what to do if a cold-weather health emergency arises.

Those at risk

During extreme cold weather, everyone is at risk, but some groups are more vulnerable than others. They include:

- Homeless people
- Outdoor workers
- Sport enthusiasts (skiers, ice skaters)
- People living in homes that are poorly insulated or without heat
- People living in homes without power (usually due to other weather-related events such as a winter storm)
- Children and infants (under 1 year). Infants lose body heat more easily than adults & unlike adults can't make enough body heat by shivering.¹
- People 65 years of age or older → Older adults often make less heat because of a slower metabolism & less physical activity.¹

When it is safe to do so, you can visit, telephone or check in on them regularly ensuring they have warm clothing, basic necessities and a safe means to stay warm. If needed take them to warm locations such as local libraries or shopping malls.

Outdoor Safety and Travel

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

- Plan ahead – listen to the weather forecast and be prepared.
- Dress warmly and cover exposed skin. Frost bite can occur in as little as 30 seconds.
- Wear several layers of loose fitting clothing made of wool, silk or polypropylene (these materials retain more heat than cotton).
- Stay dry, wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess sweating will also increase heat loss. Therefore when you feel too warm, remove some of the extra layers of clothing.
- 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.
- Listen to the radio or television for travel advisories.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, overpasses, and bridges or when visibility is poor.

¹ Centre for Disease Control, "Extreme Cold – A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety", PG 6

COLD WEATHER: OUTDOOR SAFETY

- 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 and additional warm clothing.
- 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.

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	Most commonly affects the hands, legs, and fingers and can lead to serious health complications.	<p>If you experience any of the symptoms listed, seek medical attention immediately.</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	Occurs when the body's normal temperature becomes too low (less than 35°C).	<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 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520) or visit the following websites.

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit www.simcoemuskokahealth.org
 Environment Canada www.ec.gc.ca