

Cold Weather

Hypothermia —

Loss of large amounts of body heat. It is dangerous and can be fatal. You can become hypothermic if you are

- Outside in cold weather for long periods of time.
- Cold and wet for a long period of time, or if you fall into cold water.
- Tired, hungry or dehydrated, you have an increased risk of getting hypothermia.

Symptoms of Hypothermia include

- Excessive shivering, poor coordination and slurred speech.
- Blue lips and fingers.
- Stiff arms and legs.
- Confusion, lack of judgement in seeking protection from the cold
- Slow heart rate and unconsciousness

How to Treat the Symptoms

- Call 911 – hypothermia can be life threatening
- Replace wet clothes with dry
- Cover the head
- Cover with a blanket, sheet or tarp and use your body heat to warm the hypothermic person
- Warm the neck, chest, armpits and groin first
- If the person is awake, have them take small sips of warm, non-alcoholic drinks
- Re-warm slowly. Do **not** take a hot shower or bath as this can result in shock
- Limit physical activity, such as walking, climbing or lifting until symptoms subside

Frostbite — Occurs when ice crystals freeze exposed body parts. Frostbite especially affects the nose, feet, hands and ears. If you have had frostbite before, the area is more likely to be frostbitten again. You can get frostbite by

- Leaving body parts exposed to cold weather
- Touching cold metal, such as car door handles or metal equipment
- Tight clothing or shoe laces cutting off the blood supply to hands or feet
- Contact with very cold liquids such as gasoline or cleaning fluids

Why is Cold Weather Hazardous?

Cold weather is dangerous if you don't know the hazards. Workers in cold, icy, windy and wet conditions are at risk for injury.

Symptoms of Frostbite are pain, numbness and/or paleness in the affected body parts

How to Treat the Symptoms

- Move to a warm place
- Apply warmth to frostbitten areas (warm breath, lukewarm water, warm towel)
- Remove tight clothing, jewellery and wristwatches
- Elevate the frostbitten area
- See a doctor if the area hardens or turns blue. Frostbitten areas can easily become infected.

Dehydration — We lose moisture from our bodies by breathing and sweating. Cold air is very dry and promotes loss of moisture. Dehydration increases the risk of hypothermia.

Symptoms of Dehydration include

- Dry mouth and increased thirst
- Headache and nausea
- Decreased urination

How to Treat the Symptoms

- Give small, frequent sips of warm fluid
- Avoid alcoholic or caffeinated drinks

Trench Foot (Immersion Foot) —

Happens when your feet are in cold water for long periods of time and/or sweat excessively in non-breathable footwear (e.g., rubber boots).

Symptoms of Trench Foot include

- Red, numb and burning or tingling feet.
- Feet become painful, swollen and bleed into the skin in severe cases
- See a doctor if it is severe, as this can lead to gangrene

How to Treat the Symptoms

- Remove wet shoes, boots and socks
- Dry feet well, and massage to promote blood flow
- Seek first aid for infection

Sunburn — can still happen when it is cold.

Sunburns are a visible reaction of the skin from being exposed to the sun's UV rays.

Symptoms of sunburn include

- Red, blistered or swollen skin
- Dry, itchy, flaky skin days after the burn

How to Treat the Symptoms

Wear sunscreen on all exposed body parts, including face, lips, ears and backs of hands.

Snow Blindness — occurs when the sun is reflected off snow or ice.

Symptoms of snow blindness include

Red, watery and irritated eyes

How to Treat the Symptoms

Wear eye protection that can block out the UV rays

What Can Your Employer Do?

- ✓ Provide regular rest breaks and a safe place to warm up
- ✓ Set a slow, steady work pace so workers can avoid sweating
- ✓ Provide water for workers. Staying hydrated will reduce your risk for some cold weather hazards.
- ✓ Educate employees about the hazards of working in cold weather
- ✓ Provide training on how to protect yourself
- ✓ Recognize the warning signs of hazards and get medical attention.

What Can You Do To Prevent Cold Weather Injuries?

- ✓ Dress appropriately. Wear several protective layers to trap body heat.
 - Outside layer – wind resistant and breathable
 - Middle layer – wool or down, it will keep you warm even if it is wet
 - Inside layer – cotton and breathable to let moisture out.

- ✓ Wear a hat. 30% of body heat is lost through the head if it is not covered.
- ✓ Wear mittens instead of gloves.
- ✓ Change your clothes. Dry, clean clothes (including socks) will protect you better than wet or oily clothes. Use foot powder to keep feet dry.
- ✓ Use the 'Buddy System'. Look out for your coworkers and watch for signs of cold weather hazards.
- ✓ Drink fluids often. If you are hydrated, you will be better protected.
- ✓ Eat nutritious foods. Proper nutrition will help your body adjust to cold temperatures.
- ✓ Avoid alcohol or any other mind-altering drugs that will affect your ability to keep yourself warm.
- ✓ Do not smoke. Smoking narrows the blood vessels, and prevents your blood from circulating and keeping you warm.

What Can Your Health and Safety Committee Do?

- ✓ Review the work practices. For example, reduce the time outdoors, encourage regular breaks, and analyse the risks workers are exposed to.
- ✓ Provide a checklist to your employer for things needed on a job site, such as, drinking water, people trained in first aid, a place to get warm, etc.
- ✓ Work with your employer to provide education and training to workers.
- ✓ Research new Personal Protective Equipment (PPE's) such as cold weather boots, mitts and windbreaker jackets.

If you need more information contact the

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