



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLD WEATHER HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Kenosha – January 15, 2009 - As temperatures drop and wind chill advisories are in effect, the Kenosha County Division of Health is issuing tips for keeping warm and safe during extreme weather.

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

Warning signs of hypothermia:

Adults:

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

Infants:

- bright red, cold skin
- very low energy

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.

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. 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 are
- 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.

TAKING PREVENTIVE ACTION Have furnaces checked annually for efficient and safe operation before the heating season arrives. Check on elderly relatives, friends and neighbors. Monitor the rooms where infants sleep or spend periods of time. When spending time outdoors, adults and children should dress warmly and stay dry. Layer clothing, preferably wind resistant, to reduce loss of body-heat caused by the wind. Tell relatives and friends where you are going and when you expect to return. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

TIPS TO SURVIVE THE COLD:

1. **Go outdoors only when necessary.** Make trips outside as brief as possible.
2. **Dress warmly and stay dry.**

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

3. **Avoid alcohol.** Alcoholic beverages interfere with circulation and impair judgment.
4. **Eat well.** Good nutrition helps keep body warm.

For additional information on cold-related health and safety, visit the Department of Health Services website

<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/InjuryPrevention/WeatherRelated/WinterCold/index.htm>.