

Cold Weather Tips

What is Hypothermia and Frostbite

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reminds Marylanders of the dangers associated with cold weather health hazards such as *hypothermia* and *frostbite*.

Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature falls below 95°F. Nearly 600 Americans die each year from hypothermia.

There is increased risk for hypothermia in...

- Small children - especially babies, because they have a lot of skin surface area compared to the size of their little bodies and tend to lose heat quicker than older children and adults;
- People who suffer from illnesses, impaired mental function or take strong medications that can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. All of these factors can add up to significant risk increases among elderly persons;
- Persons who are hungry or are dehydrated;
- Persons with inadequate or wet clothing, both leading to faster loss of body heat; and
- Persons who have been drinking alcohol, which hastens heat loss through the skin and lowers awareness levels.

Symptoms may include:

- Uncontrollable shivering;
- Cold, pale skin;
- Numbness;
- Fatigue;
- Poor circulation;
- Disorientation;
- Slurred speech; and
- Bluish or puffy skin.

Frostbite refers to actual freezing and subsequent destruction of body tissue which is likely to occur any time skin temperature gets much below 32°F. The areas most likely to freeze are toes, fingers, ears, cheeks and the tip of the nose.

Persons at greatest risk for frostbite include those with impaired circulation, the elderly, the very young and anyone who remains outside for prolonged periods. The danger increases if the individual becomes wet.

Symptoms of frostbite include:

- Gradual numbness;

- Hardness and paleness of the affected area during exposure,
- Pain and tingling or burning in affected area following warming; and
- Possible change of skin color to purple.

NEVER MASSAGE OR RUB FROSTBITTEN AREAS AS THIS MAY CAUSE FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE SKIN.

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