



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IDPH Cold Weather Health Safety Tips

Watch out for frostbite and hypothermia

SPRINGFIELD – As Illinois faces bitterly cold temperatures, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) reminds people of the health dangers of extreme low temperatures and tips on how to stay warm.

Frostbite

Parts of the body most commonly affected by frostbite due to exposed skin include the face, ears, hands, and feet. Frostbitten skin is whitish and stiff, and the area will feel numb rather than painful. To treat frostbite, warm the affected part of the body gradually. Wrap the frostbitten area in blankets, sweaters, coats, etc. and seek medical attention immediately. Do not rub frostbitten areas because the friction can damage the tissue.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is caused by a drop in body temperature to 95 degrees Fahrenheit (F) or less and can be fatal if not detected promptly and treated properly. The condition usually develops over a period of time, anywhere from a few days to several weeks. Even mildly cool indoor temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees can trigger hypothermia. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk of hypothermia. Signs of hypothermia include:

- Forgetfulness
- Drowsiness
- Slurred speech
- Weak pulse
- Slow heartbeat
- Very slow, shallow breathing

If you notice these symptoms, take the person's temperature. If the person's temperature is 95 degrees or below, call a doctor or ambulance, or take the victim directly to a hospital. A drop in temperature below 90 degrees can create a life-threatening situation. To prevent further heat loss, wrap the person in a warm blanket. Do not give a hypothermia victim a hot shower or bath because it could cause shock. Do not try to treat hypothermia at home. The condition should be treated in a hospital.

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Dressing for the cold

If you need to be outside, the following suggestions will help keep you warm and protect your body from excessive heat loss.

- Wear several layers of lightweight clothing rather than one or two layers of heavy garments. The air between the layers of clothing acts as insulation to keep you warmer.
- Cover your head. You lose as much as 50 percent of your body heat through your head.
- Wear mittens rather than fingered gloves.
- Wear warm leg coverings and heavy socks or two pairs of lightweight socks.
- Wear waterproof boots or sturdy shoes that give you maximum traction.
- Cover your ears and the lower part of your face. The ears, nose, chin, and forehead are most susceptible to frostbite. Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect the lungs from directly inhaling extremely cold air.

Shoveling

Cold weather itself, without any physical exertion, puts an extra strain on your heart so know your limits when shoveling snow, especially if you do not exercise regularly. If you have a history of heart trouble or any chronic health concerns, talk to your health care provider before shoveling snow. You should rest frequently and pace yourself when shoveling. Remember to lift the snow with your legs, not your back. If you use a snow blower, never use your hands to unclog the machine. If you become breathless, stop, go indoors and warm up before continuing. If you experience chest or arm pain or numbness, stop immediately and go indoors; you may need to call 911. Overexertion can cause sore muscles, falls, and heart attacks.

Heating Safety

For people needing to use alternative sources of heat, IDPH has the following reminders:

- Any heater that uses wood, coal, natural gas, or kerosene produces carbon monoxide (CO), so adequate ventilation is essential.
- Never use a generator indoors, even with open doors or windows.
- Do not use charcoal or gas grills indoors.
- Do not use a gas oven to heat your home.

You cannot see or smell carbon monoxide, but at high levels it can kill a person in minutes. Symptoms of mild to moderate CO poisoning include headaches, dizziness, nausea and lethargy. Higher levels of CO exposure can cause fainting, confusion and collapse and if exposure continues, death can result.

[Weathering Winter](#) information can be found on the IDPH website, and additional safety information is available on the state's Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov.