



# Protecting Your Child from Injury During Cold Weather

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Exposure to cold can cause injury or serious illness such as frostbite or hypothermia. The likelihood of injury or illness depends on several factors including temperature, wind, humidity, physical activity, clothing, working and living conditions, and a person's age and state of health. The air temperature does not have to be below freezing for someone to experience cold emergencies such as hypothermia and frostbite. Wind speed can create dangerously cold conditions even when the temperature is not that low. Below are some tips for outdoor safety during cold weather events.

## **If children go outside...**

- If possible, avoid being outside in the coldest part of the day, or for extended periods of time in extreme cold weather.
- Take frequent breaks in a warm place and stay hydrated.

## **If children are walking on snow & ice covered areas...**

- Young children should have adult supervision when walking on snow & ice covered sidewalks and streets.
- Walk on sidewalks if possible.
- If you must walk in the street, walk as close to the curb as possible while facing traffic. Always be aware of the approaching traffic.
- Before you step off the curb to cross the street, make sure oncoming cars and trucks have come to a complete stop. Be aware that cars and trucks may not be able to stop at crosswalks and traffic signals.
- When walking on snow or ice, use short steps and keep your hands out of your pockets. These factors will help you maintain your balance. In addition, a heavy backpack can challenge your balance. Try not to carry too much, leaving your hands and arms free to better balance.
- If you do fall, tuck your arms close to your body and roll with the fall.

**Dress appropriately and stay dry.** Appropriate amounts and types of clothing are the most important method of providing protection from cold-related injury. Adults and children should wear:

- A hat—most of your body heat is lost through your head.
- A scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth
- Sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- Mittens—they provide more warmth than gloves.
- Water-resistant coat and boots.
- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing—Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body heat loss caused by

wind. Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton.

- Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly.
- Get out of wet clothes immediately and warm the core body temperature with a blanket or warm fluids like hot cider or soup.
- Whenever you feel too warm, remove extra layers of clothing in order to prevent excess perspiration, which increases heat loss.

**Recognize the symptoms of 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, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation and among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures. Seek medical attention immediately if you recognize any of the following symptoms:

- Gray, white, or yellow skin discoloration
- Numbness
- Waxy feeling skin

**Recognize the symptoms of 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. Seek medical attention immediately if you recognize any of the following symptoms:

- Shivering, exhaustion
- Confusion, fumbling hands
- Memory loss, slurred speech
- Drowsiness
- Bright red, cold skin (infants)
- Very low energy (infants)

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Information presented here has been compiled from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the American Red Cross, the Connecticut Department of Transportation and Oklahoma State University.