

Hypothermia Facts

For More Information

For questions regarding winter preparedness activities, contact your local health department.

Local Health Departments

Baker	541-523-8211
Benton.....	541-766-6835
Clackamas	503-655-8430
Clatsop	503-325-8500
Columbia	503-397-4651
Coos.....	541-756-2020
.....	ext. 510
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Wallowa	541-426-4848
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Wheeler.....	541-763-2725
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Introduction

- When exposed to cold temperatures, your body can lose heat faster than you produce it.
- Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature.
- Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.
- Severe hypothermia can lead to death. In Oregon, there are, on average, nine deaths per year from exposure to excessive cold.

Causes of hypothermia

- Hypothermia occurs when heat escapes from your body faster than it can warm itself. This often happens in cool outdoor weather (below 50 degrees F.) when wind chill, wet or too little clothing, fatigue, and/or poor nutrition lower the body's ability to cope with cold.
- It can even happen indoors when temperatures are routinely kept below 60 degrees F.
 - Victims of hypothermia often are:
 - ❖ Elderly people with inadequate food, clothing or heating
 - ❖ Babies sleeping in cold bedrooms
 - ❖ People who remain outdoors for long periods—the homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.
 - ❖ People who drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.
- Acute hypothermia can happen when a person experiences a rapid loss of body heat, usually from submersion in cold water.

Recognizing hypothermia

- In adults, symptoms of hypothermia may include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss and slurred speech.
- In infants, warning signs of hypothermia may include bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

Treatment for mild hypothermia

- Get the person to a warm area and take off any wet clothing.
- Gradually rewarm them by applying a gentle source of heat to the groin, head, neck and sides of the chest. Use an electric blanket or hot water bottles, if available. If not, use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages. These lower the body's temperature.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.

Treatment for severe hypothermia:

- Treat a person with severe hypothermia (body temperature at or below 95° F) as a medical emergency and call 911. Let the hospital re-warm the victim.

Hypothermia Facts

For winter safety tips visit:

The American Academy of
Pediatricians

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/decwintertips.cfm>

The Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/hypothermia.asp>

For winter pet safety tips visit:

Oregon Veterinary Medical
Association

<http://oregonvma.org/care-health/winter-pet-care-tips>

- People who have severe hypothermia must be carefully re-warmed and their temperatures monitored.
- Gently remove all wet clothing and wrap the person warmly.
- Once shivering has stopped, the person has lost the ability to generate heat. They need a gentle source of heat, like another human body.
- Warm the person's lungs by mouth-to-mouth breathing.
- Do not rub the person or move their arms or legs.
- Do not use direct heat or hot water to warm the person. Immersing a person in warm water re-warms them too fast.
- Even someone who shows no signs of life may survive if given the proper care.
- A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing. Even if the victim appears dead, emergency resuscitation (CPR) should be provided. CPR should continue while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical aid becomes available.

Note: These measures don't take the place of proper medical care. Hypothermia is a medical emergency and victims should be treated by a medical professional.

Preventing hypothermia

- Everyone, especially the elderly and ill, should have adequate food, clothing, shelter, and sources of heat.
- Blankets can help, even in poorly heated rooms.
- Infants lose body heat more easily than adults. Infants less than one year old should never sleep in a cold room. Provide warm clothing and a blanket for infants and try to maintain a warm indoor temperature.
- When going outside in cold weather, wear several layers of loose clothing including a hat. Layering provides better insulation. Layers can also be removed if you become too hot.
- Boots should be waterproof and insulated.
- Be sure to protect the ears, face, hands and feet in extremely cold weather. Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin.
- Move into warm locations periodically. Limit the amount of time outside on extremely cold days.
- Move around. Physical activity raises body temperature.

A first aid or CPR course can help you prepare for cold-weather health problems. Knowing what to do is an important part of protecting your health and the health of others.

This document can be furnished in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities. Available formats are large print, Braille, audio tape, electronic, oral presentation and computer disk (in ASCII format).

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