

Media Release

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Tips for Dealing with Cold Weather

Another Canadian winter is here! Unfortunately, there are more than eighty fatalities due to cold weather in Canada per year, and even more people endure bodily harm. (Environment Canada, 2001 http://www.ec.gc.ca/media_archive/press/2001/011030_n_e.htm) Frostbite and hypothermia are real potential dangers especially for individuals who are out in the elements for long periods of time, those who have a decreased sensation in their extremities, and for children.

Frostbite is the freezing of skin and the layers of tissue underneath and usually occurs when temperatures drop below -4 C. Frostbite is hard to feel, so when enjoying the outdoors make sure to check for white or gray spots on skin or areas that have lost feeling. Sometimes tingling or pain can be a warning sign of frostbite, usually occurring in hands, feet, nose and ears.

Hypothermia takes place when heat is lost faster than your body can create it. This can be very dangerous because once body temperature goes too low, an individual is not able to think clearly. Hypothermia requires immediate medical attention. Signs of hypothermia include shivering, loss of memory, lethargy, speech is slurred or loss of consciousness. If you see any of these symptoms get medical attention right away.

During cold weather everyone should take the following precautions:

- Wear layers of warm dry clothing including a hat, mitts, and a layer to block the wind
- Drink warm non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated beverages such as herbal tea, apple cider or soup
- Cover exposed skin surfaces when outdoors
- Limit time spent outdoors
- Maintain a heated environment of around 20°C/ 68°F
- Be aware of how your medications or health conditions may increase your risk
- Be aware of the early signs of frostbite and hypothermia
- Be aware of the dangers of using an oven or space heater as a heating device.

For more information on how to protect yourself during extreme cold visit the Health Unit website at: www.healthunit.org or go to <http://www.mb.ec.gc.ca/air/wintersevere/index.en.html> or <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp>

For specific cold weather questions call the Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685.

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Contact: Julie Rogers BScN, RN, PHN, Public Health Nurse 613-345-5685

or Susan Healey, Communications Co-ordinator, 613-345-5685 or 613-802-0550