

Media Release

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Tips for Dealing with Cold Weather

Another Canadian winter is here! Unfortunately, there are more than eighty deaths due to cold weather in Canada per year. (Environment Canada, 2001) 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 children.

Frostbite is the freezing of skin and the layers of tissue underneath the skin. It 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 grey spots on skin or areas that have lost feeling. Sometimes tingling or pain can be a warning sign of frostbite. Frostbite usually occurs in hands, feet, nose and ears.

Hypothermia takes place when heat is lost from your body 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, slurred speech 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 or non-caffeinated beverages such as herbal tea, apple cider or soup
- Cover exposed skin surfaces when outdoors
- Maintain a heated environment of around 20°C / 68°F
- Be aware of how your medications or health conditions may increase your risk of injury from cold weather
- 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 protecting yourself during extreme, cold visit the Health Unit website at: www.healthunit.org.

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