



Weekly Safety Meeting

Cold Weather Safety - Frostbite

Extremely cold air comes every winter into at least part of the country and affects millions of people across the United States. This Arctic air can be dangerous. Combined with brisk winds, dangerous cold wind chill values can result. People exposed to extreme cold are susceptible to frostbite and can succumb to hypothermia in a matter of minutes. Areas most prone to frostbite are uncovered skin and the extremities, hands, and feet. Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it.

If you or someone you care about must venture outdoors during extreme cold this winter, dress in layers. Cover exposed skin to reduce the risk of frostbite or hypothermia. Try to seek shelter from the wind as much as possible while outside. Once inside again, change into dry clothing immediately if you are wet. Watch for frostbite and hypothermia and take immediate action upon the first detection of either.

Watch for Frostbite

Frostbite can happen in minutes, especially in the extremities such as fingers, toes, nose, and ears, but can affect any area of exposed skin. If you suspect frostbite, immediately move inside to a heated location, and begin warming the affected areas using warm water or body heat. Do not use hot water or radiant heat such as a fireplace since affected areas can be easily burned. Seek medical attention for severe frostbite.

Frostbite happens when the body's survival mechanisms kick in during extremely cold weather. To protect the vital inner organs, your body cuts circulation to your extremities, which will eventually freeze. To avoid frostbite, stay inside during severe cold, especially when the wind chill is -50 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

If you must go out, try to cover ears, nose, toes, and fingers, etc. Mittens are better than gloves. Keep your skin dry. Stay out of the wind when possible. Drink plenty of fluids since hydration increases the blood's volume, which helps prevent frostbite. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes. Caffeine constricts blood vessels, preventing warming of your extremities. Alcohol reduces shivering, which helps keep you warm. Cigarettes restrict the blood flow to your hands.

Signs and Symptoms of Frostbite

Redness or pain in any skin area may be the first sign of frostbite. Other signs and symptoms of frostbite include a white or grayish yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, and numbness.

Frostbite First Aid

Get indoors as quickly as possible. Until you can get indoors:

- Don't rub or massage cold body parts;
- Put your hands in your armpits;
- Hold onto another person or animal;
- Drink warm liquids;
- Put on extra layers of clothes, blankets, etc; and
- Remove rings, watches, and any other tight jewelry or related items.

Once indoors:

- Don't walk on a frostbitten foot. You could cause more damage;
- Get in a warm, NOT hot, bath and wrap your face and ears in a moist, warm, NOT hot, towel; and
- Don't get near a hot stove or heater or use a heating pad, hot water bottle, or a hair dryer. You may burn yourself before feeling returns.

Frostbitten skin will become red and swollen and feel like it's on fire. You may develop blisters. Don't break the blisters. Doing so may cause scarring and infection.

If your skin turns blue or gray, is very swollen, blistered, or feels hard and numb even under the surface, go to the hospital as soon as possible.

STAY WARM...WATCH OUT FOR COLD!

