

Frigid With a Chance of Hypothermia

Brought to you by Pike County Health Department, Home Health and Hospice.

Hypothermia is an abnormally low body temperature and is considered more dangerous than frostbite. It is caused by the general cooling of the body and can quickly become life threatening. If the body temperature drops below 86 degrees F, death can occur. Normal body temperature is 98.6 degrees F. Those most at risk for hypothermia are people who work outside, people in poor physical condition, the elderly, infants, and people with health problems such as diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.



Pike County Health Department
Home Health & Hospice

Warning signs of hypothermia may include:

- Uncontrollable shivering, in severe cases of hypothermia, shivering stops
- Numbness
- Glassy stare
- Apathy
- Weakness
- Impaired judgment
- Drowsiness
- Slow or slurred speech
- Exhaustion
- Loss of consciousness
- In infants, the skin turns bright red and cold
- Infants with a very low energy level

What to do:

- Call 911 for immediate medical assistance
- Gently move the victim to a warm place
- Monitor the victim's blood pressure and breathing
- If needed, give rescue breathing and CPR
- Remove wet clothing
- Dry off the victim
- Take the victim's temperature
- Warm the body core first, NOT the extremities. Warming the extremities first can cause shock. It can also drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure.
- DO NOT warm the victim too fast. Rapid warming may cause heart arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat).

How to prevent hypothermia:

- Be aware of warning signs of cold-related illness, such as uncontrollable shivering, sleepiness, confusion, changes in skin color, slurred speech and loss of consciousness.
- Stay indoors and in a warm area. If heat is not available, consider a visit to a shopping mall, public library, movie theater, church, community building or shelter.
- Increase your fluid intake – regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink fluids. Ensure infants and children drink adequate amounts of liquids.
- Avoid drinks containing caffeine and alcohol because they affect how your body reacts to the cold. Warm fluids such as broth or juice are good, as well as sports drinks.
- Wear something on your head. Fifty percent of all body heat is lost through the head, so wearing a hat will keep your whole body warmer.
- Protect the ears and face. Wear a scarf to protect your lungs from cold air – it will also protect your ears and face.
- Wear waterproof boots.
- Several layers of clothing is better than a single heavy layer. The space between the layers works as insulation to help keep you warmer.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking prescription drugs. Some drugs can affect the way your body reacts to the cold.
- Minimize sitting or squatting in the cold for prolonged periods of time. These activities can hinder circulation.
- While outdoors, take frequent breaks in a warm place.
- If you have to be outdoors, schedule outdoor activities during the warmest part of the day, usually 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Adjust to outdoor activity. Stretch and do a few exercises before going outside to work to avoid muscle strain. Extreme cold puts extra strain on the heart – no matter what your age or physical condition.
- Use the buddy system. Monitor the condition of your co-workers and have someone do the same for you. The buddy system can be used to inspect the signs of frostbite. Just before freezing, the skin, especially on the face, becomes bright red. Then small patches of white appear, as freezing actually occurs.
- Prevent chapped skin by frequent application of protective lotions.
- Carry extra clothes with you such as socks, gloves, hats and jacket so you can change them if you get wet.

Winter weather can be hazardous – be prepared, stay warm and informed.

For more information on hypothermia visit these websites: www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter and health.mo.gov.