

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Executive Office of the Mayor**



## **Tips to Prevent Cold Related Illness**

The best way to prevent hypothermia and frostbite is to stay inside. If you must go outside, here are some tips to stay warm and frostbite-free.

### **PREVENTING HYPOTHERMIA AND FROSTBITE**

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- Wear layers of loose, warm clothes; wool is best.
- Wear mittens (they are better than gloves) a hat that covers your ears, and well-fitting, waterproof boots.
- If you are outside, cover your mouth to protect your lungs from the extreme cold. Do your best to stay out of the wind.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- Do not put dry feet and socks into wet boots. If dry boots are not available, put on clean, dry socks, then slip a plastic grocery or trash bag over socks before placing feet into wet boots.
- Don't drink alcohol or caffeinated beverages or smoke cigarettes.
- Avoid taking the young and old outside in extreme cold. They are most susceptible to the cold.

### **HYPOTHERMIA**

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#### **What is Hypothermia?**

Hypothermia is a serious, potentially life-threatening condition occurring when the body temperature drops below 95 degrees (95°F). It occurs most commonly outdoors in sub-freezing weather.

#### **What are the signs of hypothermia?**

Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, confusion, disorientation, memory loss, drowsiness, exhaustion, slurred speech and fumbling hands. Hypothermia affects the brain, leaving the person unable to think clearly and move easily. The body becomes too cold to function normally. Those affected may not be aware of their condition or be able to do something about it.

#### **How is Hypothermia treated?**

If you suspect someone is suffering from hypothermia, call 911 immediately (time is very important). Get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first. You may apply warm first-aid compresses to the groin, arm pits and neck only. Cover the person with blankets and put a cap or towel on their head until help arrives. Keep the person immobile and quiet with their feet slightly elevated. If the person is conscious and alert, give them small quantities of warm sweet liquids, broth or food. Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages. If the person is not breathing and has no pulse, cardiopulmonary resuscitation should be attempted until paramedics arrive.

## **FROSTBITE**

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### **What is frostbite?**

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing, which most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation and among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures.

### **What are the signs of frostbite?**

Signs of frostbite include the following:

- **Pink:** reddish area is first sign of frostbite.
- **Pain:** area will ache or be painful.
- **Patches:** Bluish, pale or white, waxy patches.
- **Pricklies:** affected area may feel numb, stinging or tingling.

### **How is frostbite treated?**

Get into a warm room. Do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes unless necessary. Loosen or remove all jewelry, rings or tight clothing immediately before swelling begins. Drink warm, sweet beverages or broth. Slowly re-warm area using body heat. For example, the heat of an armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers or immerse affected area in warm water (do not use hot water). Do not massage, rub or apply heating pads – this may increase tissue damage. Get medical help immediately if swelling, blistering or peeling is present, there is severe pain, color and sensation do not return shortly following first aid treatment.

## **CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING**

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### **What is carbon monoxide poisoning?**

Carbon monoxide poisoning occurs when too much carbon monoxide (CO) is inhaled. CO is a toxic gas that is colorless, odorless, tasteless, and very difficult for people to detect.

### **How does carbon monoxide poisoning happen?**

CO poisoning occurs when there is a build-up of CO in a space, like a house. Build up results from poor ventilation and is commonly associated with the use of kerosene or portable flameless chemical heaters indoors. It can also result from dirty heating systems.

### **What are the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning?**

Signs include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. High levels of CO can result in loss of consciousness and death.

### **How is carbon monoxide poisoning treated?**

- Call 911 immediately.
- Open windows and doors to let fresh air in the home.
- When possible, remove the affected person from the exposure.

### **How is carbon monoxide poisoning prevented?**

- Never use a gas range or oven for heating.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a barbecue grill indoors or in any other way burn charcoal indoors.
- Never use a portable gas camp stove indoors.
- Never use a generator inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent.

(Source: CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>)