

Hypothermia Facts

For More Information:

Centers for Disease Control
& Prevention, Toll-Free:
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
1-888-232-6348 TTY
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

You can also visit the following
Web sites for more information
about hypothermia:

Centers for Disease Control
& Prevention:
[http://emergency.cdc.gov/
disasters/winter/](http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/)

Introduction

- When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced.
- Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature.
- Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.
- Severe hypothermia can lead to death. In Oregon, there are an average of nine deaths per year from exposure to excessive cold.

Causes of hypothermia

- Hypothermia occurs when heat escapes from your body faster than it can warm itself. This often happens in cool outdoor weather (below 50 degrees F.) when wind chill, wet or too little clothing, fatigue, and/or poor nutrition lower the body's ability to cope with cold.
- It can even happen indoors when temperatures are routinely kept below 60 degrees F.
- Victims of hypothermia often are:
 - o Elderly people with inadequate food, clothing or heating
 - o Babies sleeping in cold bedrooms
 - o People who remain outdoors for long periods—the homeless, hikers, hunters, etc.
 - o People who drink alcohol or use illicit drugs.
- Acute hypothermia can happen when a person experiences a rapid loss of body heat, usually from submersion in cold water.

Recognizing hypothermia

- In adults, symptoms of hypothermia may include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss and slurred speech.
- In infants, warning signs of hypothermia may include bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

Treatment for mild hypothermia

- Get the person to a warm area and take off any wet clothing.
- Gradually rewarm them by applying a gentle source of heat to the groin, head, neck and sides of the chest. Use an electric blanket or hot water bottles, if available. If not, use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages. These lower the body's temperature.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.

Local Health Departments

Baker	541-523-8211
Benton.....	541-766-6835
Clackamas	503-655-8430
Clatsop	503-325-8500
Columbia	503-397-4651
Coos.....	541-756-2020
.....ext.	510
Crook.....	541-447-5165
Curry.....	541-247-3300
Deschutes.....	541-322-7400
Douglas.....	800-234-0985
Gilliam.....	541-384-2061
Grant	541-575-0429
Harney	541-573-2271
Hood River	541-386-1115
Jackson.....	541-774-8209
Jefferson	541-475-4456
Josephine	541-474-5325
Klamath.....	541-882-8846
Lake	541-947-6045
Lane.....	541-682-4041
Lincoln.....	541-265-4112
Linn.....	541-967-3888
Malheur.....	541-889-7279
Marion	503-584-4870
Morrow.....	541-676-5421
Multnomah.....	503-988-3674
Polk.....	503-623-8175
Sherman	541-506-2600
Tillamook.....	503-842-3900
Umatilla.....	541-278-5432
Union	541-962-8801
Wallowa.....	541-426-4848
Wasco.....	541-506-2600
Washington	503-846-3594
Wheeler.....	541-763-2725
Yamhill.....	503-434-7525

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Treatment for severe hypothermia:

- Treat a person with severe hypothermia (temperature at or below 95° F) as a medical emergency and call 911. Let the hospital rewarm the victim.
- Do not attempt to transport the person unless there are no other options. If immediate access to emergency medical assistance is not available, transport gently. Jostling the person may cause the heart to stop beating.
- People who have severe hypothermia must be carefully rewarmed and their temperatures monitored.
- Gently remove all wet clothing and wrap the person warmly.
- Once shivering has stopped, the person has lost the ability to generate heat. They need a gentle source of heat, like another human body.
- Warm the person’s lungs by mouth-to-mouth breathing.
- Do not rub the person or move their arms or legs.
- Do not use direct heat or hot water to warm the person. Immersing a person in warm water rewarms them too fast.
- Even someone who shows no signs of life may survive if given the proper care.
- A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing. Even if the victim appears dead, emergency resuscitation (CPR) should be provided. CPR should continue while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical aid becomes available.

Note: These procedures are not substitutes for proper medical care. Hypothermia is a medical emergency and victims should be treated by a medical professional.

Preventing hypothermia

- Everyone, especially the elderly and ill, should have adequate food, clothing, shelter, and sources of heat.
- Blankets can help, even in poorly heated rooms.
- Infants lose body heat more easily than adults, and infants less than one year old should never sleep in a cold room. Provide warm clothing and a blanket for infants and try to maintain a warm indoor temperature.
- When going outside in cold weather, wear several layers of loose clothing. Layering provides better insulation. Layers can also be removed if you become too hot.
- Boots should be waterproof and insulated.
- Be sure to protect the ears, face, hands and feet in extremely cold weather. Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin.
- Move into warm locations periodically. Limit the amount of time outside on extremely cold days.
- Move around. Physical activity raises body temperature.
- It is a good idea to take a first aid and CPR course to prepare for cold-weather health problems. Knowing what to do is an important part of protecting your health and the health of others.