

Winter Storms Fact Sheet: Extreme Cold

Injuries Related to Cold

- 50% happen to people over 60 years old
- More than 75% happen to males
- About 20% occur in the home

Extreme Cold

Extended exposure to extremely cold temperatures can cause frostbite or hypothermia and become life-threatening. Infants and elderly people are most susceptible. What constitutes extreme cold varies in different parts of the country and from person to person. Typically in Minnesota extreme cold usually means temperatures near or below zero degrees Fahrenheit. However even extended exposure to temperatures of 40°F or less can be hazardous to vulnerable people, especially if factored with wind chill.

Wind Chill

Wind chill is not the actual temperature but rather how wind and cold feel on exposed skin. As the wind increases, heat is carried away from the body at an accelerated rate, driving down the core body temperature. Animals are also affected by wind chill; however, cars, plants and other objects are not. A wind chill of -20° Fahrenheit (F) will cause frostbite in just 30 minutes.

[NWS Wind Chill Chart](#)

Frostbite is localized damage to body tissue caused by extreme cold. The condition causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes or the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately! If you must wait for help, slowly rewarm affected areas. However, if the person is also showing signs of hypothermia, warm the body core before the extremities.

Fact Sheet: Frostbite

Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 95°F. It can kill. For those who survive, there are likely to be lasting kidney, liver and pancreas problems.

Warning signs include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness and apparent exhaustion. Take the person's temperature. If below 95°F, seek medical care immediately!

Fact Sheet: Hypothermia

If Medical Care is Not Available, warm the person slowly, starting with the body core.

Warming the arms and legs first drives cold blood toward the heart and can lead to heart failure. If necessary, use your body heat to help. Get the person into dry clothing and wrap in a warm blanket covering the head and neck. Do not give the person alcohol, drugs, coffee or any hot beverage or food. Warm broth is the first food to offer.