

Environmental-Cold Related

Your health and safety are very important to us. Because of the large number of people with the flu, hospitals and emergency rooms are very busy. As a result, we are closely evaluating who we can take in the ambulance to the hospital.

We have evaluated that you do not need to go in the ambulance to the hospital at this time. Paramedics are giving you this sheet to help you care for yourself at home.

You can get medical care at a clinic, urgent care center or an emergency room. If you decide to do so, you will need to get to these places on your own. Remember hospitals are seeing a lot of patients with the flu. If you go to a hospital you risk getting infected with the flu.

The most common cold weather related illness and injury are hypothermia and frostbite.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is when your core body temperature drops abnormally low. Prolonged exposure to cold may result in hypothermia. When your body temperature drops too low, your brain can be affected making it difficult to think clearly or move quickly. Because of this, you may not know you are hypothermic until it is too late.

Hypothermia is more likely in very cold temperatures, but can occur even at cool temperatures if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, lying on a concrete or tile floor for long periods of time, or submersion in cool or cold water.

Signs of Hypothermia

- Shivering/exhaustion
- Confusion/fumbling hands
- Memory loss
- Slurred speech
- Drowsiness

Treatment for Hypothermia

- Get into a warm environment
- Remove wet clothing
- Warm the core of the body first with an electric blanket or skin to skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets
- If awake enough, drink warm beverages. Do not drink alcohol.

If you note confusion, memory loss, slurred speech or unconsciousness, call 911 immediately.

Frostbite

Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color to the affected areas (fingers, toes, ears, nose, or face). If not treated properly, permanent damage can occur and in some cases, the damaged part will need to be amputated.

Signs of Frostbite

- Redness or pain to exposed skin area. (This is usually the first sign).
- White or gray/yellow skin.
- Numbness. Most often people are unaware they have frostbite because the skin is numb; therefore, they have no pain.
- Skin that feels waxy, or leathery.

Treatment for Frostbite

- Get into a warm environment.
- Immerse the affected area in warm water. Do not use hot water.
- Avoid, if possible, walking on frostbitten feet or toes. This can increase damage.
- Avoid massaging or rubbing affected areas as this can cause increased damage.
- Warm affected areas using body heat.
- Do not use heating pads, stove tops, fireplaces, etc. When you are frostbitten you may not feel pain so warming affected areas using such methods can cause burns.
- Any frostbite to hands, fingers, feet, or toes should be evaluated by a physician.

This information is to help you care for a person who has had a cold exposure.

The evaluation and/or treatment by the paramedics today are not to replace the recommendation of a doctor.

You can get medical care by a doctor on your own.

You should call 911 for any medical symptom, concerns that happen after we leave today.



These Home Care Instructions are for use during specified times of severe pandemic influenza, courtesy of the Metro Region EMS System, Metro Emergency Services Board, 2099 W. University Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55014-3431