

Hypothermia



What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia happens when the body's temperature gets so low that it is hard for oxygen to get to the brain. It doesn't need to be below freezing to get hypothermia. People can become hypothermic from a short exposure to severe cold or longer exposure to mild to moderate temperatures. The chances of getting hypothermia are higher with a wind-chill and rain.

Signs of hypothermia

Look for the "...umbles"

a person who **mumbles**

a person who **stumbles**

a person who **fumbles** objects

Who is at risk?

Anyone is vulnerable when the temperature gets low, but these people are more likely to get hypothermia:

- Older adults, especially those who may have poor quality housing, clothing, or food
- People who are unhoused, who lack shelter, who lack proper clothing and food
- Outdoor workers who do not have the right equipment
- Sport enthusiasts such as hikers or skiers

Also look for these signs



Shivering

Shivering can stop if body temperature falls below 32°C.



Feeling confused



Slow, shallow breathing



Hard to wake up



Pale, cold, blue-grey skin



Numbness



Slow pulse

These icons by Icons8

If you know someone who is vulnerable or you work with people who are at risk in cold weather, explain hypothermia to them and teach them how to stay safe in the cold.

If you notice someone showing signs of hypothermia, start first-aid (see next page). Call 9-1-1 to get medical care right away.



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Tips for staying warm

- Wear clothes in layers or make sure those in your care do.
 - **Inner layer** (closest to the skin) should be a "wicking" fabric to draw any moisture away from the skin, such as synthetics like polyester and nylon, and merino wool.
 - **Middle layer** should be the insulating layer to prevent loss of your body heat while keeping the cold outside air away.
 - **Outer layer** should be the "windbreaking" layer to reduce the chances of cold air reaching the insulating layer.
- Drink warm fluids. It is safest to not drink alcohol. Alcohol promotes heat loss and can lead to a false sense of warmth.
- Try not to do activities that make you sweat. This can cause wet clothes, increasing chances of hypothermia. If doing an activity outside, remove some layers to keep from getting too hot. Once done the activity, put your layers back on to keep warm.
- Wear a hat. Almost half of your body heat loss can happen through the head.
- Wear gloves, mittens, or both.
- Wear a neck warmer to protect the chin, lips, and cheeks.
- When heading on an outdoor adventure, create a trip plan that includes where you are going and when you plan to be back. Leave your trip plan with a person who is not traveling with you. Consider using an app, such *AdventureSmart*.
- Bring a map and a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) device with SOS function so you can call for help in case of an emergency. Do not rely on cell phones as you might be in an area without service.
- For small children, check for cold, reddening skin, and low energy. Take their temperature using a rectal thermometer. Hypothermia can happen in children when the body gets below 35 degrees.

What to do when someone shows signs of hypothermia



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