



## **Extreme Cold:**

The purpose of this Alert is to provide critical information to caregivers on Winter Weather precautions. People with developmental disabilities are at a high risk for injury due to falls and exposure to inclement weather. Those providing care can reduce these risks and seek immediate medical care when needed.

**When winter temperatures drop significantly, staying warm and safe can be a real challenge.** Here are some helpful hints to stay warm and healthy during the cold winter months.

To avoid cold-related complications:

- Dress in layers of loose, dry clothing.
- Be sure to have a heavy winter or water/wind resistant coat and boots
- Be sure to adequately cover hands, feet, face, nose and head.
- A warm hat or hood is critical as up to 40 percent of the body's heat is lost if the head isn't covered.
- Wear a hat, scarf and mittens/gloves
- Wear sturdy shoes and boots with good tread.

## **Hypothermia:**

When exposed to cold temperatures, the body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to the cold will eventually use up the body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the person unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and will not be able to do anything about it. Hypothermia is most likely to occur at very cold temperatures, but it can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40 degrees Fahrenheit) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

## **What to do:**

If you notice any of these signs, take the person's temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, the situation is an emergency; get medical attention immediately.

If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, as follows;

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- If the person is wearing any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first: chest, neck, head and groin; using an electric blanket if available. Or 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 offer alcoholic beverages. Never give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature, has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.



A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing. In this case, handle the person gently and get emergency assistance (911) immediately. Even if the person appears lifeless, CPR should be provided. CPR should continue while the person is being warmed, until responsive or until medical aid becomes available. In some cases, a person with hypothermia who appears lifeless can be successfully resuscitated.

**Frostbite:**

This is an injury to the body caused by exposure to cold temperatures. At the first sign of redness or pain in any skin area get out of the cold and protect any exposed skin.

Signs/symptoms of frostbite include:

- A white grayish-yellow skin color
- Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- Numbness

**What to do:**

If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care immediately (911). If (1) there is frostbite but no sign of hypothermia and (2) immediate medical care is not available, proceed as follows:

- Get into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes; this increases the damage.
- Immerse the affected area in warm, not hot, water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).
- Or, warm the affected area using body heat. For example, the heat of an armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it at all. This can cause more damage.
- Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

**Winter Weather Precautions:**

- Avoid going outside without proper clothing including hats and gloves.
- Do not stay outdoors too long in the extreme cold.
- Avoid walking on frozen ponds or lakes unless the ice has been checked and is safe.
- Be careful when walking on steps, sidewalk or streets which may be slippery and increase the risk of falling.
- Make sure individuals are well supervised so accidental exposure to extreme temperatures is avoided.
- Understand first aid for Frostbite and Hypothermia so immediate attention can be given in an emergency.
- Prepare in advance when conducting outdoor activities and trips. Take along extra clothing, blankets, warm liquids, etc.
- Be very careful with any heating elements. (Space heaters, fireplaces, furnaces, etc.) Assure that all are in good working order before being used for the winter.