

Don't run the risk of hypothermia

Exposure to cold is a leading cause of weather-related fatalities and is responsible for many more deaths annually than is exposure to heat.

The condition known as hypothermia begins when a person's core body temperature decreases to 95°F (35°C) or lower. Workers in construction, agriculture, commercial fishing and other maritime jobs or who otherwise spend time outdoors or in unheated environments need to take precautions against it.

Treating hypothermia in its early stages can be very important, otherwise the condition can become moderate or severe.

Initial symptoms include shivering and cool extremities. As hypothermia worsens, symptoms progress to confusion, loss of fine motor skills and amnesia. Continued heat loss without adequate rewarming can result in impaired respiration, cardiac arrhythmias and death.

Although hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, it can occur at temperatures above 40°F (4.5°C) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat or immersion in cold water.

Drug and alcohol abuse can contribute to hypothermia by blunting the body's responses to cold and can lead to prolonged exposure as a result of impaired judgment.

Workers are at increased risk when they have health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension.



Wearing clothes in layers can go a long way toward preventing hypothermia.

Follow these guidelines:

- The inner layer (closest to the skin) should have wicking properties to move any moisture away from the skin.
- The middle layer should be insulating to prevent loss of body heat and keep cold outside air away.
- The outer layer should be windbreaking to reduce chances of cold air reaching the insulating layer. For wet conditions, the outer layer should be waterproof.

It's also a very good practice to wear gloves, mittens or both and a hat — a considerable amount of body heat can be lost through the head. A scarf will help protect the chin, lips and cheeks, all of which are extremely susceptible to cold weather injuries.

Immediate medical attention should be sought for anyone who appears to have hypothermia. Until it is available, these steps can be followed:

- Move the person gently to a warm, dry location if possible. If you're unable to get out of the cold, shield him or her from it as much as possible.
- Limit movements to only those that are necessary.
- Don't massage or rub the person. Excessive, vigorous or jarring movements can trigger cardiac arrest.
- If the person is wearing wet clothing, remove it. Cut away clothing if necessary to avoid excessive movement.
- Use layers of dry blankets or coats to warm the person. Cover the head, leaving only the face exposed.
- If the person's breathing has stopped or appears dangerously low or shallow, begin CPR immediately if you're trained.
- To warm the person's body, remove your clothing and lie next to the person, making skin-to-skin contact, then cover both of your bodies with blankets.
- If the affected person is alert and able to swallow, provide a warm, sweet, non-alcoholic, noncaffeinated beverage to help warm the body.
- Don't use hot water, a heating pad or a heating lamp to warm the person. The extreme heat can damage the skin or, even worse, cause irregular heartbeats so severe that they can cause the heart to stop.

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The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

- 1 Exposure to cold is a leading cause of weather-related fatalities.
True ____ False ____
- 2 Does hypothermia begin when a person's core body temperature decreases to 95°F (35°C) or lower?
Yes ____ No ____
- 3 If hypothermia is not treated in its early stages, the condition can become which of these?
A. Painful
B. Moderate
C. Exhausting
D. Severe
E. None of the above
- 4 Drug and alcohol abuse cannot contribute to hypothermia.
True ____ False ____
- 5 When dressing in layers, the middle layer should:
A. Have wicking properties to move any moisture away from the skin.
B. Be the windbreaking layer to reduce the chances of cold air reaching the insulating layer.
C. Be insulating to prevent loss of body heat while keeping the cold outside air away.
D. None of the above.
- 6 Hypothermia can occur when temperatures are cool but not overly cold.
True ____ False ____
- 7 Which of these steps should be taken with someone showing symptoms of hypothermia:
A. Move the person gently to a warm, dry location if possible.
B. Massage or rub the person vigorously to warm them up.
C. If the person is wearing wet clothing, remove it.
D. If the person is alert and able to swallow, provide a warm, sweet, non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverage.
E. All of the above.
- 8 Could your work expose you to conditions that might cause hypothermia?
True ____ False ____ Don't Know ____

ANSWERS: 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. B, 4. D, 5. False, 6. C, 7. A, C and D, 8. B, Your answer

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Hold These Thoughts

Water doesn't have to be extremely cold to cause hypothermia. Any water colder than normal body temperature causes heat loss. The following tips may increase survival time in cold water for those who fall in:

Wear a life jacket. If you plan to ride in a watercraft, it can help you stay alive longer in cold water by enabling you to float without using energy and by providing some insulation. Keep a whistle attached to your life jacket to signal for help.

Get out of the water as much as possible, such as climbing onto a capsized boat or grabbing onto a floating object.

Don't attempt to swim unless a boat, another person or a life jacket is close by. Swimming will use up energy and may shorten survival time.

Position your body to minimize heat loss. Use a body position known as the heat escape lessening position (HELP) to reduce heat loss while you wait for assistance. Hold your knees to your chest to protect the trunk of your body. If you're wearing a life jacket that turns your face down in this position, bring your legs tightly together, your arms to your sides and your head back.

Huddle with others. If you've fallen into cold water with other people, keep warm by facing each other in a tight circle.

Don't remove your clothing. While you're in the water, don't remove clothing because it helps to insulate you from the water. Buckle, button and zip up your clothes. Cover your head if possible. Remove clothing only after you're safely out of the water and can take measures to get dry and warm.

Safety Meeting For the Record



Date of Meeting: _____

Topic: _____

Location: _____

Department: _____

Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance:

I really happened...

A worker who was alone at a restaurant entered a walk-in freezer. When the door closed, he was unable to move the 'mushroom-cap' handle to open the door from the inside. Three hours later, the employer found the worker unconscious, suffering hypothermia and frostbite.

The freezer door could not be opened because the push rod of the mushroom-cap handle was encased in ice. The door was usually open while a worker was inside, so the mushroom cap was used rarely. It had probably taken weeks or even months for dripping water to freeze inside the handle. Ice is more likely to build up in hot, humid weather when there is a greater difference in temperature inside and outside the freezer.

Safe work practices:

- Inspect and depress the mushroom cap release handle regularly so that ice does not build up. Make sure the cap can move in and out easily at all times.
- Make sure workers know how the mushroom cap handle works and how to break the ice if the handle won't move. For example, try to turn or push the knob. A worker might need to kick the cap several times or hit it with a heavy object to break the ice inside.
- Follow written procedures for checking on the safety of a person working alone.
- Develop emergency procedures in case someone is trapped inside the freezer.

Note: TalksZone safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.