

Health and Welfare Alert
Winter Weather # 52-11-14

Purpose

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 should seek immediate medical care when needed.

All DD Employees are required to be trained, annually, on identification and reporting of Major Unusual Incidents and Unusual Incidents prior to direct contact. This training includes the review of any **Health and Welfare Alerts** released since the previous calendar year's training.

For questions or comments, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

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 temperature 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.
- Make sure to use handrails when climbing stairs to preventing falling on ice
- Ensure walkways are clear of ice and snow

**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 victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't 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. Body heat is lost much more rapidly in 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. Avoid caffeinated beverages which promote water loss in an individual that tends to be dehydrated.
- After the 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. Wind is an added risk factor for frostbite in cold weather. 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:

- **1st Degree**-Skin is itchy and painful. A white or grayish-yellow skin color called "Frosting" appears and the part goes numb.
- **2nd Degree**-Blisters appear usually in 1-2 days

Signs/Symptoms of frostbite continued:

- **3-4th Degree**-Skin turns hard, waxy, black and there are blisters. These burns also include a loss of feeling.

What to do:

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

- Go to a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes; this increases 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.
- Don't 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

Winter Weather Precautions:

- Have a disaster preparedness plan.
- Prepare your home for winter. Assure that all heating sources are in good working order.
- Avoid going outside without proper clothing including hats and gloves.
- Have a portable radio, flash lights, extra clothes, water and food, and other emergency supplies in your home and car.
- Don't 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, sidewalks or streets which may be slippery and increase the risk of falling.
- Ensure that low-hanging and dead tree branches are cut and removed.
- 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 situation.
- 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.)

More Info:

Please visit the Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness at:

<http://www.weathersafetv.ohio.gov/WinterHealthSafetyTips.aspx>

Winter Weather Tips are also posted on STEADY U at www.steadyu.ohio.gov

Winter Weather Safety Tips from the Ohio Dept. of Health:

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/features/odhfeature/winterweather.aspx>

For Road Conditions, Traffic and Closures; visit:

<http://www.ohgo.com/>

For Questions or Comments

For questions or comments regarding this alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit.

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