

Winter Weather: Outdoor Safety

Highlights

- Dress warmly, stay dry, wear a hat, scarf, & mittens.
- Avoid frostbite.
- if you have to do heavy outdoor chores, dress warmly & work slowly.
- Avoid walking on ice or getting wet.
- Notify friends & family where you will be before you go hiking, camping, or skiing.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, overpasses, & bridges.
- If you are stranded, it is safest to stay in your car.

When the weather is extremely cold, & especially if there are high winds, try to stay indoors. Make any trips outside as brief as possible.

Adults & children should wear:

- a hat, a scarf or knit mask to cover face & mouth
- sleeves that are snug at the wrist
- mittens (they are warmer than gloves)
- water-resistant coat & boots
- several layers of loose-fitting clothing



Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind. Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Also, avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing & fueling your car or using a snow blower. These materials in contact with the skin greatly increase heat loss from the body. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

Avoid Frostbite& Hypothermia

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your 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 & won't be able to do anything about it.

Hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, but it can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling & color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, & severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased in people with reduced blood circulation & among people who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures

Avoid Exertion

Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice about shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold. Otherwise, if you have to do heavy outdoor chores, dress warmly & work slowly. Remember, your body is already working hard just to stay warm, so don't overdo it.

Avoid Ice

Walking on ice is extremely dangerous. Many cold-weather injuries result from falls on ice-covered sidewalks, steps, driveways, & porches. Keep your steps & walkways as free of ice as possible by using rock salt or another chemical de-icing compound. Sand may also be used on walkways to reduce the risk of slipping.

Be Safe During Recreation

Notify friends & family where you will be before you go hiking, camping, or skiing. Do not leave areas of the skin exposed to the cold. Avoid perspiring or becoming overtired. Be prepared to take emergency shelter. Pack dry clothing, a 2-wave radio, waterproof matches & paraffin fire starters. Do not use alcohol & other mood altering substances, & avoid caffeinated beverages. Carefully watch for signs of cold-weather health problems.

Be Cautious About Travel

- Listen for radio or television reports of travel advisories issued by the National Weather Service.
- Do not travel in low visibility conditions.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, overpasses, & bridges.
- If you must travel by car, use tire chains & take a mobile phone with you.
- If you must travel, let someone know your destination & when you expect to arrive. Ask them to notify authorities if you are late.
- Check & restock the winter emergency supplies in your car before you leave.
- Never pour water on your windshield to remove ice or snow; shattering may occur.
- Don't rely on a car to provide sufficient heat; the car may break down.
- Always carry additional warm clothing appropriate for the winter conditions.

What to Do if You Get Stranded

Staying in your vehicle when stranded is often the safest choice if winter storms create poor visibility or if roadways are ice covered. These steps will increase your safety when stranded:

- Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna as a signal to rescuers & raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing).
- Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area.
- Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers.
- Stay awake. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems.
- Run the motor (& heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening 1 window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- As you sit, keep moving your arms & legs to improve your circulation & stay warmer.
- Do not eat unmelted snow because it will lower your body temperature.
- Huddle with other people for warmth.



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