



Cold-Related Hazards

Cold winter months pose special hazards for outdoor workers who must protect themselves against frigid temperatures, freezing precipitation, and other hazards. Employers and employees should know not only the symptoms of cold-related illnesses, but also what to do in the event we, or one of our coworkers, exhibit those symptoms on the job.

You can treat mild frostbite (frostnip) with first aid. All other frostbite requires medical attention. First-aid steps for frostbite are:

- Check for hypothermia. Get emergency medical help if you suspect hypothermia.
- Protect your skin from further damage. If there's any chance the affected areas will freeze again, don't thaw them. If they're already thawed, wrap them up so that they don't refreeze.
- Get out of the cold. Once you're indoors, remove wet clothes and wrap up in a warm blanket. Take care to not break any blisters.
- Gently rewarm frostbitten areas. Soak the frostbitten areas in warm water — 99 to 104 F. If a thermometer isn't available, test the water by placing an uninjured hand or elbow in it — it should feel very warm — not hot. Rewarming takes about 30 minutes. Stop the soaking when the skin becomes its normal color or loses its numbness.
- Don't rewarm frostbitten skin with direct heat, such as a stove, heat lamp, fireplace or heating pad. This can cause burns.
- Drink warm liquids. Tea, coffee or soup can help warm you from the inside. Don't drink alcohol.
- Know what to expect as skin thaws. If the skin turns red and you feel tingling and burning as it warms, normal blood flow is returning. Seek emergency help if numbness or pain persists during warming, or if you develop blisters.

If you suspect someone has hypothermia, call 911 or your local emergency number. Then immediately take these steps:

- Gently move the person out of the cold. If going indoors isn't possible, protect the person from the wind, especially around the neck and head. Insulate the individual from the cold ground.
- Gently remove wet clothing. Replace wet things with warm, dry coats or blankets.
- If further warming is needed, do so gradually. For example, apply warm, dry compresses to the center of the body — neck, chest and groin. The CDC says another option is using an electric blanket, if available. If you use hot water bottles or a chemical hot pack, first wrap it in a towel before applying.



- Offer the person warm, sweet, nonalcoholic drinks.
- Begin CPR if the person shows no signs of life, such as breathing, coughing or movement.

Caution

- Do not rewarm the person too quickly, such as with a heating lamp or hot bath.
- Don't attempt to warm the arms and legs. Heating or massaging the limbs of someone in this condition can stress the heart and lungs.
- Don't give the person alcohol or cigarettes. Alcohol hinders the rewarming process, and tobacco products interfere with circulation that is needed for rewarming.