

Hypothermia FactSheet

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Dangers

Hypothermia occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95 degrees. This can happen during prolonged exposure to cold weather, or even after a few minutes in extremely low temperatures. One of the main dangers of hypothermia is that the temperature drop may be gradual, and an early symptom of hypothermia is mental confusion, the victim may not know a problem exists. Therefore, employers and workers who may participate in outdoor activities or work outdoors in cold weather should take precautions against hypothermia.

Some workers can be at an increased risk to hypothermia if they have predisposing health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension; they take certain medication; and/or they are in poor physical condition, have a poor diet, or are older.

Employers and workers can take steps to reduce the potential dangers of hypothermia.

Train workers about cold-related conditions.

- Recognize the environmental and workplace conditions that lead to potential cold induced illnesses and injuries.
- Watch for hypothermia symptoms including confusion, drowsiness, slurred speech, drop in blood pressure, shallow breathing, and a pinkish tint to the skin.
- Be extremely cautious in the wind. A strong wind, even in only moderately cool weather, can cause a wind chill far below freezing.
- Encourage workers to wear proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions. Layer clothing to adjust to changing environmental temperatures. Wear underwear that will keep water away from skin (polypropylene).
- Encourage workers to wear a hat, gloves, and a “cold weather mask”. Since considerable body heat is lost through the scalp and the hands, nose, cheeks, ears, etc., these body parts need protection.
- Be sure that workers take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to allow body to warm up.
- Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day.

- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- Use the buddy system – work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs.
- Drink plenty of fluids that are warm and sweet; avoiding drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Eat regularly; eating warm, high-calorie foods.

If a worker shows signs of hypothermia:

- call for emergency help immediately;
- move person to a warm, dry area;
- remove any wet clothing and replace with warm, dry clothing or wrap the person’s entire body in blankets or covers;
- give person warm, sweet, drinks if they are alert, avoiding drinks with caffeine or alcohol; and
- move their arms and legs to create muscle heat or place warm bottles or hot packs in the armpits, groin, neck, and head areas.

Employers and workers should always check local weather forecasts for information on temperature and wind chill to prevent cold-related conditions like hypothermia.



This fact sheet was produced with information from the Texas Health Department, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and Texas Workers' Compensation Commission.

Texas Workers' Compensation Commission
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