

HYPOTHERMIA

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Each year when the weather gets cold, and the thermometer drops into the single digits or lower, we hear of cases where individuals have either died or suffered serious injury from Hypothermia. Hypothermia is “a decrease where the core body temperature lowers to a level at which normal muscular and cerebral functions are impaired”. When the body temperature drops we become subject to Hypothermia.

As warm blooded mammals, we are constantly producing body heat. The body maintains a constant heat level of 98.6. When temperatures fall, the body may not be able to generate enough heat without adequate protective clothing or the ability to warm the body. Prolong exposure causes the body temperature to fall to dangerous levels which could cause serious injury or even death. Hypothermia results from the following:

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|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| * Cold temperatures | * Fatigue/Exhaustion | * Lack of Knowledge of |
| * Improper Clothing | * Dehydration | what causes Hypothermia |
| * Wetness | * Poor food intake | |

The following are common signs of hypothermia:

* **Mild Cases**

- * Watch for the “Umbles” - Stumbles, mumbles, fumbles and grumbles
- * Shivering beyond voluntary control
- * Loss of motor function.

* **Moderate Cases**

- * Dazed
- * Loss of fine motor coordination
- * Slurred speech
- * Violent shivering
- * Irrational behavior
- * Don't care attitude.

* **Severe Cases**

- * Core temperature drops below 92°, this is immediately dangerous to life and health
- * Shivering occurs in waves after violent wave until shivering stops
- * Person can't walk
- * Muscle rigidity develops
- * Skin is pale or blue
- * Pupils dilate.

Severe cases can result in death if treatment is not received immediately.

Prevention of hypothermia begins with an awareness of the weather conditions and the appropriate steps that can be taken to mitigate the effects of hypothermia. Heat loss has to be reduced. To do this the appropriate winter clothing is required. Wear good shoes or boots preferably water resistant, layer clothing, for the body protect the hands, ears and face. These areas are susceptible to frost bite. Reduce the length of time you have to spend outside if possible. Eat foods that help increase body heat, hot liquids, sugars, and carbohydrates. Avoid alcohol, tobacco and caffeine, these cause more heat loss, dehydration and the increases risk of Frost Bite. Avoid wet areas if possible and if clothing gets wet change as soon as possible.

Hypothermia can be a killer. Do not become a victim. Plan your daily tasks, dress properly, get out of the cold where possible, eat foods that increase heat and avoid wet environments if possible. If you see someone showing symptoms of Hypothermia, get them out of the cold and seek professional care immediately.

If you have any safety related questions or need help with your Safety Program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.