

JANUARY 2022 CCDC SAFETY MESSAGE

REDUCING COLD STRESS DURING WINTER WEATHER

December through February are typically the coldest months in the Northern Hemisphere, with the potential to bring sub-zero temperatures, biting winds, ice, and snowstorms. CDC data shows that these 3 months have the highest death rates of any months in a year. There are many causes of these fatalities one of which is cold stress related fatalities.

The National Weather Service reminds us that the risk of hypothermia (a condition where your body can no longer produce heat) is not limited to negative temperatures but can also happen between temperatures of 30 and 50 degrees.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the most common signs of hypothermia are low body temperature, shivering, fatigue, confusion, drowsiness, slurred speech, or blue-tinted skin

We all should recognize the symptoms of cold stress, as well as how to prevent common cold-related injuries and illnesses. Self-monitoring and monitoring others for symptoms can reduce negative consequences.

AlertMedia suggests protecting your body by dressing appropriately for cold weather is extremely important to prevent injuries caused by cold stress. Layering is key when dressing for cold weather as it keeps you warm and insulated. It is recommended to wear at least three layers of warm, loose clothing when working in extremely cold environments and cover as much exposed skin as possible. Make sure the layers are not too restrictive and provide enough ventilation, as tight clothing can reduce blood flow and circulation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) says wool, silk and synthetic clothing fabrics are best since they can stay well insulated even when they become damp or wet. Avoid cotton materials as they lose their insulating properties when wet.

For individuals that will be exposed to cold temperatures for extended periods of time, nutritionists recommend eating foods that take longer to digest, as this helps raise your body temperature (a process called “thermogenesis”). Examples include bananas, ginger tea, oats, coffee, red meat, sweet potatoes, and squash. Many foods with healthy fats, proteins, and carbohydrates are complex and take longer to digest.

Those who are outside should also drink more water than they typically do because we dehydrate more quickly in cold temperatures. Also, dehydration causes headaches, fatigue, and dizziness—all situations that could endanger colleagues who need to stay alert. When we are cold, warm beverages can help increase our body temperature — sugar water or sports drinks with electrolytes are best when working in these conditions.

Implement another self-care practice by planning time indoors throughout the day. Whether that is inside a building, shelter, or vehicle, everyone should build in time to take a break from the chill. If possible, use the “buddy system,” with teams of two looking out for each other. This can include setting check-in times with someone who is indoors if you are enjoying outdoor activities by yourself.

THINK SMART, BE AWARE, BE FLEXIBLE, BE EDUICATED (SAFE)