



## Northwestern Health Unit

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### Extreme Cold Warnings

This time of year, extreme cold warnings are often issued by Environment Canada for the region. The Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) would like to remind people to take extra caution when spending time outdoors during extreme cold events.

“When temperatures reach  $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$  or below, with or without the wind chill, the risk of a cold-related injury such as frostbite or hypothermia increases. For example, in  $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$ , exposed skin can freeze in 10-30 minutes, or even sooner if the wind speed is faster” says Thomas Nabb, Manager of Environmental Health.

Cold-related injuries include frostbite and hypothermia. Frostbite is a condition where the skin freezes. Signs and symptoms of frostbite include pale or waxy skin, swelling or blistering of the skin, or numbness or pain on the area. Hypothermia is a condition where a person gets so cold that the core body temperature drops below  $35^{\circ}\text{C}$ . When this happens, internal organs begin to shut down. Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, slurred speech, weakness, confusion, pale skin colour, and slow, shallow breathing.

Populations at greater risk of cold-related injuries include: infants and children; elderly; people with chronic conditions (such as heart disease, respiratory disease, asthma); outdoor workers; sports enthusiasts; and people lacking proper shelter, clothing or food.

To prevent a cold-related injury:

- Dress in layers of warm clothing
- Ensure hands, feet and head, are covered with a hat, scarf, insulated gloves, and waterproof boots
- Check ears, nose, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes for signs of frostbite regularly
- Reschedule, reduce time or cancel any planned outdoor activity
- Keep infants and children inside
- Check frequently on populations at risk greater risk of cold-related injuries.

Cold-related injuries are medical emergencies. Call 911 immediately if you are caring for or see someone who has been exposed to cold temperatures and shows any of the above signs and symptoms.

For more information on how to keep warm and stay safe this winter, visit [www.nwhu.on.ca](http://www.nwhu.on.ca).

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