



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

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When cold weather hits, know what to do

Winter has arrived and the Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) would like to remind people in Northwestern Ontario to take extra caution when spending time outdoors.

“When temperatures reach -28oC or below, with or without the wind chill, the risk of a cold-related injury such as frostbite or hypothermia becomes much higher. For example, in -28oC, 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 freezing of skin and underlying tissues occurs. 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 the core body temperature drops below 35oC due to cold exposure. As the body loses heat, internal organs begin to shut down. Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, slurred speech, weakness, confusion, pale skin colour, and slow, shallow breathing.

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.

Populations at greater risk of cold-related injuries include: infants and children, elderly, people with chronic conditions (i.e. heart diseases, respiratory diseases, or asthma), outdoor workers, sports enthusiasts, people who are homeless, and people lacking proper shelter, clothing or food.

To prevent a cold-related injury, dress in layers of warm clothing, ensure extremities are covered with a hat, scarf, insulated gloves, and waterproof boots. Stay dry, stay active, and try to reduce times of outdoor activity. Be sure to check ears, nose, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes for signs of frostbite. Try to reschedule or cancel any planned outdoor activity if possible and keep infants and children inside. Also, be sure to check frequently on people at risk greater risk of cold-related injuries.

For more information on how to keep warm and stay safe this winter, visit www.nwhu.on.ca or download our NWHU Connect app on iOS devices.

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