Hypothermia Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

Hypothermia occurs when your body loses its ability to maintain body heat and your core temperature drops below 95-degrees Fahrenheit. Hypothermia can lead to illness, altered decision-making ability, and even death. Hypothermia risks increase during very cold temperatures. As winds increase, they carry heat away from the body faster. Wind chill factors make perceived temperatures feel even colder than actual temperatures. For example, a 20-mile-per-hour wind can make actual 40-degree temperatures feel like 30 degrees. Moisture from fog, rain, sleet, snow, and perspiration can also cause rapid body temperature loss.

What’s the Danger

SYMPTOMS OF HYPOTHERMIA

Some of the initial symptoms of hypothermia include:

- Shivering
- Mild contraction of the blood vessels
- Upset stomach
- Increased urine production
- Mild confusion
- Numbness in the hands and other extremities

As the body continues to lose heat, these symptoms appear:

- Violent shivering
- Slow and labored movements
- Lack of coordination
- Confusion
- Lips, ears, fingers and toes may become blue.
- Skin becomes pale as surface blood vessels contract further as body focuses on keeping vital organs warm.

Symptoms of severe hypothermia:

- Shivering stops
- Inability to move
- Pulse and respiration decrease
- Difficulty speaking
- Disorientation
- Amnesia

Symptoms of the final stages of hypothermia include:

- Paradoxical undressing
- Terminal burrowing
- Organ Failure
- Coma
- Clinical Death

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

TAKE ACTION

Hypothermia is a medical emergency. If it is below 95° F, get medical attention immediately!

- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing the person is wearing.
- Warm the center of the person's body—chest, neck, head, and groin—using an electric blanket, if available. You can also use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm drinks can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic drinks. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrap their body, including their head and neck, in a warm blanket.
- Get the person proper medical attention as soon as possible.

Perform CPR, even if the person appears dead. CPR should continue until the person responds or medical aid becomes available. Keep

warming the person while performing CPR. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

WHILE WAITING FOR HELP – DO AND DON'T

- move the person indoors or somewhere sheltered as quickly as possible
- remove any wet clothing, wrap them in a blanket, sleeping bag or dry towel, making sure their head is covered
- give them a warm non-alcoholic drink and some sugary food like chocolate if they're fully awake
- keep them awake by talking to them until help arrives
- make sure you or someone else stays with them
- not use a hot bath, hot water bottle or heat lamp to warm them up

BEST SAFETY HYPOTHERMIA WORK GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES

Plan your work according to the weather forecast. Cancel or postpone work when severe weather is anticipated.

- Extreme and sudden temperature drops that don't give you a chance to acclimate to the cold.
- Increased winds that can make cold temperatures feel even colder due to wind chill factor.
- Rain, sleet, or snow that can get you wet and put you at higher risk of hypothermia.
- Ice conditions that can cause vehicle accidents, slip hazards, or physical hazards from falling icicles.

Prepare ahead for cold weather work, watch out for yourself and coworkers, and use safe work practices.

- Using communication methods to let others know your work location and when to expect you back.
- Using the buddy system to monitor each other for signs and symptoms of hypothermia.
- Carrying extra cold weather gear and changes of clothing.
- Stocking your first aid kit with chemical heat packs.

Dress properly for cold weather to help your body conserve energy and stay dry and warm.

- A hat and earmuffs to cover your hair, head, and ears.
- A scarf that can be layered and pulled up to protect your neck, nose, and cheeks.
- Mittens (typically warmer than gloves).
- Several loose layers of clothing for good insulation.

FINAL WORD

Hypothermia sets in when the body temperature drops from normal (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) to below 95 degrees. The heart, nervous system, and other organs cannot function normally when the body temperature drops too low. If untreated, hypothermia can lead to heart failure, respiratory system failure, and death.