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# Fast Facts

## Protecting Yourself from Cold Stress

Workers who are exposed to extreme cold or work in cold environments may be at risk of cold stress. Extremely cold or wet weather is a dangerous situation that can cause occupational illness and injuries such as hypothermia, frostbite, trench foot, and chilblains.

### Hypothermia

A condition in which the body uses up its stored energy and can no longer produce heat. Often occurs after prolonged exposure to cold temperature.

#### Early symptoms

- Shivering
- Fatigue
- Loss of coordination
- Confusion and disorientation

#### Late symptoms

- No shivering
- Blue skin
- Dilated pupils
- Slowed pulse and breathing
- Loss of consciousness

#### First Aid

- Request immediate medical assistance.
- Move the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Warm the center of their body first—chest, neck, head, and groin—using an electric blanket; or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, or towels.
- If conscious, warm beverages may help increase the body temperature. Do not give alcohol.
- Once temperature has increased keep them dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
- If no pulse, begin CPR.

### Frostbite

An injury to the body that is caused by freezing, which most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes.

#### Symptoms

- Reduced blood flow to hands and feet
- Numbness
- Aching
- Tingling or stinging
- Bluish or pale, waxy skin

#### First Aid

- Get into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes.
- Immerse the affected area in warm (not hot) water, or warm the affected area using body heat. Do not use a heating pad, fireplace, or radiator for warming.
- Do not massage the frostbitten area; doing so may cause more damage.

## Trench Foot

An injury of the feet resulting from prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions that can occur at temperatures as high as 60 °F if the feet are constantly wet.

### Symptoms

- Reddening of the skin
- Numbness
- Leg cramps
- Swelling
- Tingling pain
- Blisters or ulcers
- Bleeding under the skin
- Gangrene (foot may turn dark purple, blue, or gray)

### First Aid

- Remove shoes/boots and wet socks.
- Dry feet.
- Avoid walking on feet, as this may cause tissue damage.

## Chilblains

Ulcers formed by damaged small blood vessels in the skin, caused by the repeated exposure of skin to temperatures just above freezing to as high as 60 °F.

### Symptoms

- Redness
- Itching
- Possible blistering
- Inflammation
- Possible ulceration in severe cases

### First Aid

- Avoid scratching.
- Slowly warm the skin.
- Use corticosteroid creams to relieve itching and swelling
- Keep blisters and ulcers clean and covered.

## Protect Yourself

- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers.
- Wear appropriate clothing.
  - Wear several layers of loose clothing for insulation.
  - Tight clothing reduces blood circulation to the extremities.
- Be aware that some clothing may restrict movement resulting in a hazardous situation.
- Protect the ears, face, hands and feet in extremely cold or wet weather.
  - Boots should be waterproof and insulated.
  - Wear a hat to reduce the loss of body heat from your head.
- Move into warm locations during breaks; limit the amount of time outside.
- Carry extra socks, gloves, hats, jacket, blankets, a change of clothes and a thermos of hot liquid.
- Include chemical hot packs in your first aid kit.
- Avoid touching cold metal surfaces with bare skin.

### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

[www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/outdoor/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/outdoor/)

DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2010-115

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