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Winter Weather: Are You Ready?

Winter weather is here, and with it, come health risks. Cold weather increases the risk for hypothermia, which is a serious health problem. The information in this newsletter will help you to learn how to prevent hypothermia.

What is Hypothermia?

More than 600 people a year die from the effects of hypothermia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can be replaced, and the body can no longer maintain a normal body temperature. Your normal body temperature is about 98.6°F. If it drops to 97°F, you may have mild hypothermia. If it goes down to 95°F or lower, you have hypothermia that needs immediate medical treatment.

Are Some People More at Risk for Hypothermia than Others?

The elderly are more at risk because their bodies may not be able to adjust to cold temperatures as well as younger people. Some people who have chronic illnesses may also lose their ability to sense the cold. People who work outdoors in cold weather are at risk because of the amount of time they spend outside.

When Does Hypothermia Occur?

Hypothermia can occur when you have been out in the cold air for a long time. In addition, if your clothing becomes soaked with water, hypothermia may occur at air temperatures of over 40°F.

What are the signs of hypothermia?

The signs of hypothermia usually come on gradually and include shivering, pale or whitened skin in adults or flushed skin in children, tingling sensations in hands and feet followed by numbness, decreased coordination and slurred speech.

What Can I Do to Help Someone Who Has Hypothermia?

- Move the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove all wet clothing.
- Cover the chest, neck, head and groin with dry blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
- If the person is awake and able to drink liquids, give him or her warm liquids.

What Can I Do to Prevent Hypothermia?

Dress warmly. Be sure to wear:

- A hat, scarf or face mask that covers your head
- Gloves or mittens (mittens are warmer than gloves)
- A warm coat and boots that are water-resistant
- Several layers of loose-fitting clothing.

Stay dry. Wet clothing will chill your body very fast. If you perspire a lot, it will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm. Do not ignore shivering. It is an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Constant shivering is a signal to get indoors and warm up.

For more information about winter weather safety, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's webpage entitled "Winter Weather" at: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/>