



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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## When Working in the Cold, Be Prepared and Be Aware



**Some cold-weather dangers are obvious, but others are harder to see. When you must work in the cold, always remember to be prepared and be aware.**

When workers do their jobs in the cold, they face many risks. Some cold-weather dangers are obvious, but others are harder to see. Sometimes you might not even think it's very cold, but a cold-weather injury can still harm you.

When you must work in the cold, always remember to **be prepared** and **be aware**.

### Be Prepared

Workers who must be out in the cold should wear warm clothing that is right for the weather. Wear several layers of loose clothing. Layering provides better insulation.

Gloves should protect the hands, and a hat and/or hood should protect the head. In wet conditions, shoes should be waterproof and have good traction. Make sure that your cold-weather gear does not restrict your movement or block your eyesight.



Be prepared for working in the cold, even if the cold is not extreme. It's obvious that bitter cold and howling winds can harm you, but did you know that you could suffer cold-weather injuries when it is as warm as 60° F?

### Be Aware

#### Hypothermia

One of the biggest dangers from working in the cold can be the hardest to detect. Hypothermia


([http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#\\_Hypothermia](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Hypothermia)) happens when your body temperature drops below 95° F. Mild hypothermia can make you feel confused, and you may not think anything is wrong until it is too late. Being too cold can also cloud your judgment and cause you to make mistakes while you work, and mistakes can sometimes be deadly.



Early symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, feeling tired, being clumsy, and being confused. As

your body loses more heat, the shivering may stop, your skin may turn blue, the pupils of your eye may expand, your pulse and breathing may slow, and you may pass out.

You can avoid becoming too cold by wearing clothing that is right for the cold weather.

For more information about hypothermia and other cold weather injuries, see the NIOSH Fast Facts card, [Protecting Yourself from Cold Stress](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-115/pdfs/2010-115.pdf)  [PDF - 576KB] (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-115/pdfs/2010-115.pdf>).

## Frostbite

Many parts of the body are prone to [frostbite](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Frostbite) ([http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#\\_Frostbite](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Frostbite)), including your fingers, toes, nose, and ears. Frostbite happens when a part of the body freezes, and this can damage tissue. If the tissue can't be saved, the body part may need to be removed to prevent even worse health problems. Warning signs of frostbite include numbness or tingling, stinging, or pain where you are most exposed to the cold. Avoid frostbite by being aware of the weather and wearing protective clothing such as warm gloves, insulated shoes, and warm hats. The colder it is, the faster frostbite can set in, and so you shouldn't stay in the cold any longer than you need to.

## Other Cold Weather Injuries

You can get [trench foot](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Trench_Foot) ([http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#\\_Trench\\_Foot](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Trench_Foot)) when your feet are wet and cold for too long. Moisture causes your feet to lose heat, and this can slow the blood flow and damage tissue. Trench foot can happen when it is as warm as 60° F.

Sometimes cool weather can damage your skin and cause [chilblains](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Chilblains) ([http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#\\_Chilblains](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/coldstress/#_Chilblains)). This problem can cause broken skin, swelling, blisters, redness, and itching. It can also happen when it is as warm as 60° F.

## Be Ready for the Cold

If you have to work in the cold, always wear clothes that are right for the weather. Remember that you may not think it's that cold, but your body could be stressed enough that you make poor decisions or react more slowly than normal. Tell your supervisor if you are not dressed warmly enough. Pay attention to warning signs of hypothermia, frostbite, or other cold-weather injuries.

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