



## Cold Weather Health Issues and Concerns

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reminds residents that there are many serious health issues to consider during cold winter weather. As a result of exposure to cold, individuals may experience low body temperature, which may lead to hypothermia and even death. Freezing of exposed skin and tissues, such as the ears, nose, feet and face, may lead to frostbite, frostnip and trench foot.

There are many factors that influence the effects of cold on individuals. Cold-related illness and injury may occur at **moderate temperatures** as a result of wind and humidity or an inability to properly heat the home during cold weather. Factors placing individuals at risk for cold-related illnesses include:

- Extremes of age
- Underlying chronic medical illnesses and diseases, such as:
  - Psoriasis or extensive skin burns
  - Underactive thyroid
  - Underactive adrenal gland
- Alcohol use
- Physical condition
- Medications that can affect an individual's judgment, such as Valium and phenobarbital
- Over-exertion and sweating while outside

Signs of low body temperature include:

- Shivering
- Increased breathing, blood pressure and heart rate
- Pale white skin
- Amnesia
- Difficulty with muscle coordination
- Difficulty walking and talking
- Poor judgment, confusion and combativeness
- Fatigue

Treatment of hypothermia includes taking shelter, removing wet clothes, dressing in warm, dry clothes and re-warming the body.

As a result of the increased stress on the body, individuals working in the cold may experience heart attacks and strokes. Be sure to consult your physician or health care provider when considering tasks such as shoveling snow or any kind of exercise during severe winter weather.

Frostbite results in pale frozen skin, with or without blisters, and frozen tissues that may be numb. Individuals with frostbite are advised to seek medical attention. Frostbitten tissues should not be rubbed and should be elevated. Refreezing of thawed frostbitten tissues must be avoided.

For more information on public health and emergency preparedness, visit <http://preparedness.dhmh.maryland.gov> and [www.facebook.com/MarylandOPR](http://www.facebook.com/MarylandOPR).