

Cold Weather Health Guidelines for the Elderly

General Guidelines

1. Pay attention to how cold it is where you are. Body changes that come with aging may make it more difficult to feel that you are getting cold. It may also be harder for the body to warm itself.
2. Stay inside when it is very cold and windy outside. A high wind can quickly lower your body temperature. Find safe ways to stay active even when it's cold outside.
3. If you must go outside cover up! Wear a warm hat, gloves (mittens are better), scarf and boots.
4. Wear several layers of loose clothing when it is cold. The layers will trap warm air between them. Tight clothing can keep your blood from flowing freely and lead to loss of body heat. Remove wet clothing. Use an extra blanket at night.
5. Eat well and eat enough. If you are unable to keep close to your ideal weight, you might have less fat under your skin. Fat keeps heat in your body.
6. Keep any illnesses under control. See your doctor regularly. Some illnesses make it harder for your body to stay warm. Take extra care if you have:
 - low thyroid hormone (hypothyroid),
 - problems that keep the blood flowing normally such as diabetes,
 - skin conditions such as Psoriasis which allows your body to lose heat more quickly,
 - arthritis, Parkinson's disease ,or have had a fall that makes it more difficult to move around and add more clothing, or
 - had a stroke, memory disorders or dementia that can make clear thinking more difficult.
7. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist how the medicines you take affect body heat. Certain drugs used to treat anxiety, depression, or nausea can increase the risk of accidental hypothermia.
8. Do not drink alcohol before bedtime when it gets colder outside. Alcohol makes you lose body heat faster.
9. Ask a neighbour, friend, or relative to check on you if you live alone. People that live alone are at risk because there is no one else to comment on the chilliness of the home or to notice if a person is having symptoms of hypothermia.

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Kingston
221 Portsmouth Avenue
Kingston, ON K7M 1V5
Tel: 613-549-1232
1-800-267-7875
Fax: 613-549-7896

Cloyne
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14209 Highway 41
Cloyne, ON K0H 1K0
Tel: 613-336-8989
Fax: 613-336-0522

Napanee
41 Dundas Street
Napanee, ON
K7R 1Z5
Tel: 613-354-3357
Fax: 354-6267

Sharbot Lake
P.O. Box 149
1130 Elizabeth Street
Sharbot Lake, ON K0H 2P0
Tel: 613-279-2151
Fax: 613-279-3997

10. Tune in! Listen to weather forecasts on local radio stations and plan your outings accordingly.

During a Cold weather warning – additional guidelines:

- Buddy with a friend. Call a friend daily to check if he/she is
1) **Warm:** If they seem confused, they may not realize the coldness of their dwelling and may be experiencing hypothermia. Ask them to check and report to you the temperature on their thermostat.
(Hypothermia can even occur indoors when temperatures are 16°C (61°F) or lower) and
2) drinking enough liquids to stay **hydrated**, or
3) experiencing **worsening medical conditions**. If you suspect a problem, visit your buddy or call 911 immediately.
- If your friend has been outside check for signs of cold weather injuries (see *Cold weather injuries: Know what to look for, know what to do!*).
- When the temperature is below -25°C or wind chill colder than -28 the elderly should stay indoors.

During a cold weather emergency – additional guidelines

- Danger! Outdoor conditions are hazardous – stay indoors (see *Tips for staying warm indoors*).
- Call the elderly often to ensure that they are safe and in a warm environment.
- Listen to local radio stations, call or visit the website of your local municipal office for emergency information and resources.

Tips for staying warm indoors

- Try to set your thermostat for at least 20-21°C (68-70°F). Homes or apartments that are not warm enough can cause people to become very sick.
- If your landlord controls the heat in your home, a minimum temperature of 20°C (68°F) must be maintained from September 1 to June 15 (*Ontario Residential Tenancies Act, 2006*). Local bylaws or standards may prescribe higher temperatures.
- Keep the heat in and the cold out:
 - Improve the insulation in your home to help reduce heating costs.
 - Use plastic window insulation on your windows. Seal any gaps around the windows with weather stripping or caulk to keep the cold air out.
 - If you need to reduce heating costs, heat only the rooms you use, close heating vents and doors to any bedrooms not being used.
 - Keep blinds and curtains closed to prevent heat loss through the windows.
 - Place a rolled towel in front of some doors to keep out drafts.
- Avoid using space heaters. Some types are fire hazards and others can cause carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you have a limited income, you may qualify for help paying your heating bills. Contact your local utility provider.

Cold Weather Injuries: Know what to look for! Know what to do!

	Frostbite	Hypothermia	
	Freezing of skin and underlying tissues such as fat, muscle and bone.	Mild - Moderate	Severe
		Excessive loss of body heat and lowering of internal body temperature. People may not be aware they need help.	
Signs & Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pink - reddish area first sign of frostbite • Pain - area will become painful • Patches - white, waxy patches • Pricklies – affected area may feel numb or tingling 	<p>Adults</p> <p>Shivering and the “-umbles”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stumbles • Mumbles • Fumbles • Grumbles <p>Infants and Young Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cold reddish skin • low energy, tiredness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual behaviour • Cold, pale skin • Lethargy, fatigue • Unconscious • Abnormally slow heart rate or rate of breathing
What to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get out of the cold and wind • Loosen or remove tight clothing or jewellery that may restrict circulation • Slowly re-warm area using body heat • DO NOT rub or apply direct heat – this will increase tissue damage <p>Get medical help if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • colour and sensation do not return shortly following first aid treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move person to a warm and dry area • Remove wet clothing, • Cover with several layers of blankets or warm the person with your own body heat • If person is alert give a warm drink – NEVER alcohol • DO NOT use a hot water bottle or electric blanket <p>Get medical help if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first aid does not quickly control shivering. 	<p>CALL 911</p> <p>While waiting for medical help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle the person gently • Remove wet clothing • Cover with several layers of blankets or warm the person with your own body heat • Begin CPR if no pulse appears to be present • DO NOT use a hot water bottle or electric blanket

References:

National Institute on Aging. (2001). Hypothermia: A Cold Weather Hazard. Age Page. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/hypothermia.htm>

For further information:

Personal Medical Advice

Contact your family physician or Telehealth 1-866-797-000

General cold weather health related information

KFL&A Public Health

www.kflapublichealth.ca

Where to obtain services

Contact your local municipality or township office

County of Frontenac 613 548-9400 www.frontencacounty.ca

City of Kingston 613 546-000 www.cityofkingston.ca

County of Lennox & Addington 613 354-4883 www.lennox-addington.on.ca