

HYPOTHERMIA

The information provided in this safety topic is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice or formal first aid training.

Hypothermia occurs when the body's temperature falls below 95° F. This is when the body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Left untreated, hypothermia can be life-threatening.

- Hypothermia is often caused by exposure to cold weather or immersion in a cold body of water. Ongoing exposure to indoor temperatures below 50° F can also cause hypothermia.

Signs and symptoms of hypothermia usually develop slowly and may include:

- shivering (this may stop as body temperature drops)
- slurred speech or mumbling
- slow, shallow breathing
- weak pulse
- clumsiness or loss of coordination
- drowsiness, fatigue, or very low energy
- confusion or memory loss
- loss of consciousness

Hypothermia is an emergency, seek medical care immediately. To prevent further heat loss while waiting for medical care:

1. Move to a warmer location.
2. Change to dry clothes.
3. Cover the body with blankets (or something similar), but do not cover the face.
4. If there is still cold air or wind, provide something to block the cold like a tarp or garbage bag and insulate the individual from the cold ground.

If medical help is more than 30 minutes away, additional first steps include:

- Provide warm, sweet, non-alcoholic drinks if the person is alert.
- Apply heat packs, if available, to the armpits, sides of the chest, neck, and groin.
- Get additional rewarming instructions from medical professionals.

Discussion

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While working in cold temperatures, why would it be beneficial to always have an extra set of clothes, even if you think you have no risk of getting wet?