

Hypothermia FactSheet

HS04-005C (7-08)

Dangers

Hypothermia occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95 degrees. This can happen during prolonged exposure to cold weather, or even after a few minutes in extremely low temperatures. One of the main dangers of hypothermia is that the temperature drop may be gradual, and since an early symptom of hypothermia is mental confusion, the victim may not know a problem exists. Therefore, employers and workers who may participate in outdoor activities or work outdoors in cold weather should take precautions against hypothermia.

Some workers can be at an increased risk to hypothermia if they have predisposing health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension; if they take certain medication; and/or they are in poor physical condition, have a poor diet, or are older.

Employers and workers can take steps to reduce the potential dangers of hypothermia.

- Teach workers about cold-related conditions.
- Recognize the environmental and workplace conditions that lead to potential cold induced illnesses and injuries.
- Watch for hypothermia symptoms including confusion, drowsiness, slurred speech, drop in blood pressure, shallow breathing, and a pinkish tint to the skin.
- Be extremely cautious in the wind. A strong wind, even in only moderately cool weather, can cause a wind chill far below freezing.
- Encourage workers to wear proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions. Layer clothing to adjust to changing environmental temperatures. Wear underwear that will keep water away from skin (polypropylene).
- Encourage workers to wear a hat, gloves, and a “cold weather mask,” since considerable body heat is lost through the scalp and the hands, nose, cheeks, ears, etc.

- Be sure that workers take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to allow body to warm up.
- Try to schedule work for the warmest part of the day.
- Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm.
- Use the buddy system – work in pairs so that one worker can recognize danger signs in another.
- Drink plenty of fluids that are warm and sweet. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Eat regularly; eat warm, high-calorie foods.

If a worker shows signs of hypothermia:

- call for emergency help immediately;
- move person to a warm, dry area;
- remove any wet clothing and replace with warm, dry clothing or wrap the person’s entire body in blankets or covers;
- give person warm, sweet, drinks if they are alert; and
- do not use any artificial means to create heat because organ failure may occur.

Employers and workers should always check local weather forecasts for information on temperature and wind chill to prevent cold-related conditions like hypothermia.

This fact sheet was produced with information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.



The Texas Department of Insurance,
Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI, DWC)
E-mail resourcecenter@tdi.state.tx.us
or call 1-800-687-7080 for more information.

Safety Violations Hotline
1-800-452-9595
safetyhotline@tdi.state.tx.us