

BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT

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Hypothermia (Low Body Temperature)

What is hypothermia?

When exposed to cold temperatures, the body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Hypothermia is defined as a core body temperature of less than or equal to 95 degrees F or 35 C. Hypothermia affects normal muscle and brain function.

What situations can lead to hypothermia?

Cold temperatures usually below freezing, though it can occur even at cool temperatures (40 degrees F and above) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submerged in cold water. Blowing wind can also contribute to hypothermia.

Who is most at risk for hypothermia?

Older adults especially with inadequate food, clothing or heating; young children especially infants less than one year of age because they lose body heat faster than adults; adults under the influence of alcohol or medication such as sedative and hypnotics which may predispose users to hypothermia and persons who remain outdoors for long periods like homeless, hikers, skiers, etc.

What are the warning signs for hypothermia?

Do not ignore shivering. It is an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Symptoms in adults include shivering/exhaustion, confusion/fumbling hands, memory loss/slurred speech and drowsiness. Symptoms in infants/young children include bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

How should hypothermia be treated?

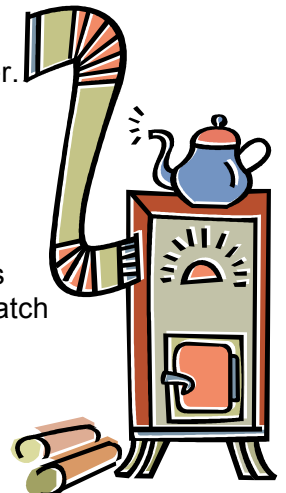
A person's temperature should be taken if signs of hypothermia are noticed. If it is below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, the situation is an emergency – get medical attention immediately. A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing. Even if the victim appears dead, CPR should continue until he/she responds or medical help arrives. Reduce heat loss by adding layers of dry clothing (remove wet clothing) and by getting the person into a warm room or shelter. Provide warm liquids that are non alcoholic. NOTE: Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.

How can you reduce the risk of hypothermia?

Wear layered warm clothing. In an emergency, keep an infant warm using your own body heat. Also, check on elderly friends and neighbors frequently to ensure that their homes are adequately heated. Maintain a warm indoor temperature. Housing codes requires that buildings maintain a temperature of 65 degrees F.

How can I heat my home safely?

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for using a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater. Remember to store a multipurpose, dry chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated; do not burn paper in a fireplace; Ensure adequate ventilation by opening an interior door or slightly opening a window if using a kerosene heater; Use only the type of fuel that the heater is designed to use – don't substitute; If a heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, don't use it. Use fireplaces, wood stoves, and other combustion heaters only if they are properly vented to the outside. Make sure chimneys and flues are periodically cleaned. Do not place a space heater near items that might catch on fire, such as drapes, furniture, or bedding.



Sources: CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics