

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cold Weather Alert

When the wind chill drops below zero, people should take precautions against hypothermia and frostbite, according to Kay Oestmann, Director of the Southeast District Health Department. "It's important to know the wind chill before going out because most hypothermia and frostbite cases occur when the temperature drops and the wind increases," Oestmann said.

The wind chill index indicates the severity of the weather in terms of the potential loss of body heat.

Hypothermia develops when an individual is exposed to severe cold without sufficient protection. The condition, which is potentially fatal, occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Infants and the elderly are at greatest risk.

The elderly account for nearly half of all victims of hypothermia. With advancing age, people become less able to adjust to temperature changes.

Observable symptoms in someone developing hypothermia include: poor coordination, slurred speech, irrationality, blueness or puffiness of the skin, dilation of the pupils, decreased respiratory rate, and a weak or irregular pulse.

Factors that increase an individual's susceptibility to hypothermia are: poor physical condition, thin build, inadequate nutrition, insufficient protection from the cold, fatigue, illness, and alcohol intoxication.

While alcoholic beverages may make the drinker feel warm, it actually interferes with the body's ability to regulate temperature. Someone showing signs of mental confusion could be mistaken for being intoxicated when he or she is actually exhibiting symptoms of hypothermia.

Dressing warmly, eating enough food, drinking plenty of fluids and staying as active as possible are good ways to maintain body heat and avoid hypothermia.

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Frostbite is another hazard experienced in extremely cold weather. The onset of frostbite is usually characterized by a sharp pricking sensation and numbness but body tissue may freeze without awareness of numbness or pain. Just before freezing, the skin turns a bright red. Frostbite most commonly affects the feet. If frostbite occurs, running *warm* water over the affected area is the recommended treatment (if re-exposure is not expected).

Proper clothing is essential to protection from frostbite. Multiple layers of clothing are better than just one, because they provide better insulation and can be removed or added as needed. The key is to make certain there are no areas of skin exposed to the frigid air.

Children who want to go out and play in the snow should periodically come indoors to warm up and dry off, according to the Nebraska SAFE KIDS Coalition. Dress them with layers of clothing and be sure to cover ears, fingers and toes. Parents should avoid taking infants outdoors when the temperature is blow freezing because infants lose body heat quickly.

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NOTE: Included is a wind chill index chart.



NWS Windchill Chart

