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Winter Weather Health: Stay Safe This Season

Although we haven't faced a long stretch of freezing temperatures yet, winter is far from over—and cold weather brings serious health hazards, including falls, frostbite, and hypothermia. The good news: there are steps we can take to prevent these risks.

- **Who Is Most at Risk?**

Older adults (especially those over 75), infants, and young children are more vulnerable because they have a harder time regulating body temperature. People with chronic conditions such as diabetes, thyroid disease, Parkinson's, or those taking certain medications also face increased risk. Memory issues like Alzheimer's can make it easy to forget essential precautions.

- **Hypothermia**

Hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95°F. It can lead to irregular heart rhythms, organ damage, and even death. It doesn't have to be below freezing—hypothermia can happen above 40°F if you're wet from rain, sweat, or cold water.

Warning signs include:

- Cold hands and feet
- Puffy or swollen face
- Pale skin
- Shivering or shaking
- Slow or slurred speech
- Sleepiness, anger, or confusion

What to do: Hypothermia is a medical emergency. Call 911 immediately. Move the person to a warm place, remove wet clothing, cover them with dry blankets or coats, and stay with them until help arrives.

- **Frostbite**

Frostbite damages skin and tissue, usually on exposed areas like fingers, toes, nose, and ears. Signs include white or grayish-yellow skin, numbness, and hard skin that doesn't move when pressed.

What to do: Call 911. Move the person indoors, remove wet or tight clothing, dry the area, and cover with blankets. Remove rings or jewelry from affected areas.

- **Cold Weather Safety Tips**

- Dress in loose layers to trap warmth; wear hats, scarves, gloves, and waterproof footwear.
- Keep your thermostat at 68°F or higher.
- Limit time outdoors in cold, windy, or damp conditions.
- Stay hydrated—dehydration increases hypothermia risk.
- Check on neighbors during extreme weather.

Cold weather can be dangerous, but preparation saves lives. By dressing warmly, staying dry, and looking out for one another, we can prevent winter emergencies and keep our community safe. Share these tips with family, friends, and neighbors. Stay warm this season.