



## Quick Guide: Recognizing Hypothermia and Frostbite Homeless Health Infectious Disease (HHID)

### General Guidance

#### Homeless Service Providers are encouraged to:

- Advise person(s) to seek shelter inside as much as possible, especially for sleeping during the winter months and/or cold temperatures.
- Remind person(s) about the importance of dressing in layers to increase their protection from the elements.
  - Several layers of loose fitting, lightweight, warm clothing will provide **more protection** than one layer of heavy clothing.
- Provide/recommend the use of a hat or head covering.
  - Heat loss is proportional to the amount of exposed surface area of the body.
- Provide/recommend glove and scarf usage.
  - Scarves can be used to protect the lungs from cold wind exposure that may lead to irritation and / or cough.
- Advise person(s) to stay as dry as possible.
  - **Water resistant outerwear** acts as the best protection for cold and precipitate conditions.
- Provide/recommend proper footwear use (socks/boots/shoes) as appropriate.



- Provide high – energy foods such as protein bars and snacks.
- Provide hearty soups and stews with high carbohydrate and protein contents.
- Encourage hydration (tea, water, and/or warmed juices).
- Alcohol consumption exacerbates heat loss.
  - Consumption may slow down circulation causing a loss of body heat in the hands and feet.

Misconception: Alcohol consumption  
“warms you up.”

If you believe someone may have hypothermia or frostbite, they should be referred for medical evaluation.

#### For person(s) coming in from the cold:

- Remove wet clothing – replace with dry clothing.
- Provide warm beverages (tea, water, and/or juice) avoiding those containing caffeine if possible.
- Assess person(s) for any of the following symptoms below – develop of these symptoms requires medical attention.

#### Additional Measures:

- Provide clothing items discussed above and additional loose layers as available.



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#### Hypothermia Risk Factors

Person(s) at higher risk of developing hypothermia include those who:

- May be spending long periods of time outside.
- Are “underdressed” for the weather.
- May be consuming alcohol and/or using substances.
- Have an underlying or pre-existing condition.
- Are over 55 years of age.
- Are undernourished.
- Have a mental health disorder.
- Experiencing an illness or active infection.
- Have mobility restraints.



- Shivering.

The signs and symptoms of Hypothermia are similar to those caused by alcohol consumption.

#### Frostbite Symptoms:

- Frost bitten areas may look dusky, dark.
- Immersion foot may look waxy, blanched, grayish/whitish in color.
- Skin may feel numb, prickly, or itchy to the person.
- As the area thaws, the skin may become red and painful.
- Encourage client to not walk on frostbitten feet or toes.

**Person(s) with symptoms of Hypothermia or Frostbite should be referred for medical evaluation.**

While person(s) are awaiting medical evaluation, staff are encouraged to:

- Provide warm, dry clothing.
- Warm – not hot – liquids.
- Avoid direct exposure to heaters or attempts to rapidly warm the person – these interventions can be harmful.

A person(s) may develop Hypothermia before outdoor temperatures reach what is considered “cold.” Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce heat.

Weather conditions such as wind and moisture can cause the body to lose heat.

#### Hypothermia Symptoms:

- Confusion.
- Slurred or delayed speech.
- A lack of coordination.
- Slowed response time.
- Sleepiness.