



When Jack Frost Comes Nipping

Winter time for children means building snow castles, tobogganing and ice-skating. Unfortunately, along with winter come frostbite, hypothermia and fever.

As a parent or caregiver, make sure the child dresses in warm layers for winter activities and does not stay in the cold for prolonged periods. Include a water- and wind-resistant coat or snowsuit, mitts, hat, scarf and boots of ample size.

If your child shows any symptoms throughout the winter season of either frostbite or hypothermia follow these safety tips. If symptoms persist, seek proper medical aid for your child.

Frostbite is as an inflammation of the skin from extreme cold.

Symptoms:

- area of skin is whiter than the surrounding area
- pain or stinging is felt, followed by numbness

Do Not:

- rub frostbitten areas
- apply strong heat, water or snow directly to the skin

Do:

- warm the area in your hands or an armpit
- place the area in warm, not hot, water until colour returns for more severe frostbite
- serve a warm snack like soup or hot chocolate

If blisters form, do not break them but do protect them with a loose dressing. As the frost-bitten area “thaws,” the child will feel pain or a burning sensation. Severe frost bite without medical care could be damaging to the child’s toes and fingers.

Hypothermia occurs when a child is exposed to cold air, cool wind, wet clothing or prolonged immersion in water that leads to a drop in body temperature below normal.

Symptoms:

- uncontrollable shivering
- numbness in hands and feet

Do:

- put the child in a dry, warm place
- remove all wet clothing; dress in dry clothes and wrap in blankets
- cover the head and neck
- apply mild heat to armpits and groin, avoid direct contact with the skin

- if the child is fully conscious and can swallow, give him/her a warm sweet, non-alcoholic liquid. (Alcohol increases heat loss and should never be given to a person suffering from hypothermia.)
- donate heat to the child by removing your upper clothing and huddle with the child under blankets or a sleeping bag.

Hypothermia could be fatal if your child experiences any of the following:

- lack of coordination
- fumbling hands
- slurred speech
- memory lapse
- blurred vision
- shivering stops
- muscles become stiff
- unconsciousness

Infants will show the following signs:

- mottled cheeks
- no crying
- weak sucking

If hypothermia becomes life threatening, call an ambulance immediately.

Fever is the body’s defence mechanism at work. A mild fever should not be a concern unless it continues for more than three days. Normal body temperature is 37°C or 98.6°F.

How to take a temperature with a glass or digital thermometer:

Under six years old:

- take the temperature under the arm
- place the silver end of thermometer in the child’s armpit
- hold the arm firmly against his/her side
- keep the thermometer in place for at least 3 minutes or until it “beeps”

Above six years old:

- take the temperature by mouth
- place the silver metal end of the thermometer under the child’s tongue for 3-4 minutes or until it “beeps”
- caution the child to keep lips closed without biting on the thermometer

To reduce a high fever:

- sponge the child with warm water
- keep room temperature at 18°C (64°F)
- remove excess clothing and covers
- give the child water, diluted juice or “flat” soft drinks.

Make sure this winter is a safe, happy and healthy one for you and your child.

