



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 an inflammation of the skin from extreme cold.

Symptoms:

- affected 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
- for more severe frostbite, place the area in warm (not hot) water until colour returns
- 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 frostbite without medical care could damage 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 checks
- no crying
- weak sucking

If hypothermia becomes life threatening, call an ambulance immediately.

Fever is the body’s defence mechanism at work. Babies younger than six months old should see a doctor when they have fever. Older children with fever who seem otherwise well and are drinking enough liquid can be treated at home. However, they should also see a doctor if their fever lasts for more than 48 hours. Normal body temperature is 37°C or 98.6°F.

How to take a temperature with a digital thermometer (glass mercury thermometers are not recommended):

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 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 her lips closed without biting on the thermometer

To reduce a high fever:

- remove excess clothing and covers
- give the child water, diluted juice or “flat” soft drinks.
- Acetaminophen is the best medication for a fever. Unless the child’s doctor says otherwise, parents can give the dose recommended on the package until the child’s temperature comes down.

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