8 FAQs about Hypothermia



What Hypothermia Is

Q: What is hypothermia?

A: A condition in which core body temperature drops below the 95.0° F (35.0° C) for normal metabolism.

Why It’s Dangerous

Q: Why is hypothermia dangerous?

A: When body temperature gets too low, the body can’t replenish the heat it loses and thus can’t carry out its normal functions.

How It’s Caused

Q: How does hypothermia happen?

A: It’s usually the result of exposure to low temperatures. Alcohol consumption and dehydration also increase hypothermia risks.

Who’s At Risk

Q: Which workers are most likely to get hypothermia?

A: Those who work in cold temperatures, either indoors or outdoors, especially those who drink alcohol before or during work.

How to Prevent It

Q: How can your workers avoid hypothermia?

A: By doing at least 4 things:

1. Drinking plenty of liquids (but not alcoholic beverages);
2. Wearing adequate protective clothing, including a hat, scarf, long-sleeved shirt, mittens (which are warmer than gloves), water-resistant coat and shoes, layers of loose-fitting clothing;
3. Staying dry and removing/replacing clothing as it gets wet; and
4. Avoiding prolonged exposure to cold weather.

How to Recognize It

Q: What are signs and symptoms of hypothermia?

A: They include the following:

- Involuntary, excessive shivering;
- Confusion;
- Drowsiness;
- Slurred speech;
- Irrational behavior;
- Falling to the ground;
- Can’t walk;
- Curls up;
- Skin becomes pale;
- Dilated pupils;
- Decreased pulse rate.

How to Treat It

Q: What should you do to help a hypothermia victim?

A: 7 things:

1. Move the victim to a warmer environment;
2. Remove wet clothing;
3. Place the victim on a blanket or a warm surface, insulating the body from the cold ground, and wrap in blankets or other warming material;
4. Apply warm compresses to the center of the body—the chest, neck, head and groin;
5. Call for medical aid immediately;
6. Provide warm beverages, such as hot chocolate; and
7. Share body heat.

How Not to Treat It

Q: Are there any things that should *not* be done to help a hypothermia victim?

A: Yes, 5 things:

1. Don’t apply direct heat, such as hot water or a heating pad;
2. Don’t attempt to warm the arms and legs as this can cause cold blood to be forced back toward the heart, lungs and brain;
3. Don’t massage or rub the person. People suffering from hypothermia must be handled gently as they’re at risk of cardiac arrest;
4. Don’t give the person an alcoholic beverage, which lowers the body’s ability to retain heat; and
5. Don’t try to give any beverage to a person who is unconscious.