

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MD. FIRE / EMS DEPARTMENT



TIPsheet

COLD WEATHER HYPERTHERMIA

NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION? PLEASE CONTACT THE
PGFD/EMS COMMUNITY OUTREACH OFFICE AT 301-883-5250



When you are exposed to cold temperatures, your body will begin to lose heat fast. Here are some precautions to put in place when dealing with cold weather conditions. The Prince George's County Fire/EMS Department wishes to remind everyone that with the cold weather upon us we must stay vigilant against circumstances that will bring on hyperthermia. Please plan your travels accordingly so that you will be ready.

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it.

Hypothermia occurs most commonly at very cold environmental temperatures, but can occur even at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if a person becomes chilled from snow, rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water. Be sure the outer layer of your clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind.

Wool, silk, or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Stay dry—wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration will increase heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing whenever you feel too warm.

Also, avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing and fueling your car or using a snow blower. These materials in contact with the skin greatly increase heat loss from the body.

DO NOT IGNORE SHIVERING

It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

What should I do if I get stranded in my car in cold weather?

- ✓ Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna as a signal to rescuers.
- ✓ Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area.
- ✓ Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers.
- ✓ Stay awake. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems.
- ✓ Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ✓ As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve your circulation and stay warmer.
- ✓ Do not eat un-melted snow because it will lower your body temperature.

Prepare your car with emergency supplies, including:

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| Cell phone; portable charger and extra batteries | Canned compressed air with sealant (emergency tire repair) |
| Shovel | Road salt and sand |
| Windshield scraper | Booster cables |
| Battery-powered radio (and extra batteries) | Emergency flares |
| Flashlight (and extra batteries) | Bright colored flag; help signs |
| Water / Snack food | First aid kit / Tool kit |
| Extra hats, coats, mittens | Road maps / Compass |
| Blankets | Waterproof matches and a can (to melt snow for water) |
| Chains or rope | Tire chains |
| | Paper towels |