

Frostbite, Hypothermia & Who to Call for Help

Who to call for help and information

- **Call 2-1-1** for information about drop in centres, community and health resource centres, food banks and community food programs, winter clothing, financial assistance with utilities and a list of Out of the Cold locations with free meals, snacks and drop-ins.
- **Call 3-1-1** to get referred to the best available shelter, or to get assistance for someone who needs transportation to get out of the cold. The City's 3-1-1 Line is available to respond to calls 24 hours a day.
- **Call 8-1-1** Health Connect Ontario for non-emergency medical advice.
- **Call 9-1-1** for medical emergency assistance such as hypothermia.



Hypothermia

Hypothermia, the most serious of cold weather complications can lead to brain damage and death. Hypothermia risks increase the colder it is both indoors and outdoors. Most susceptible are the elderly, infants, people experiencing homelessness, newcomers to Canada, and people who work or play outdoors. Whenever the body's normal temperature becomes too low, hypothermia (hypo=low and thermia=temperature) occurs and will starve the brain of much needed oxygen.

Signs of hypothermia

Look for the "UMBLES" from people affected by cold temperatures;

- a person who mumbles
- a person who stumbles
- a person who fumbles objects



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Frostbite

Frostbite injuries occur when exposed skin freezes when exposed to cold temperatures. Frostbite can lead to painful tissue damage and even amputations. Uncovered skin can freeze in as little as 10 minutes when exposed to wind chill values of -35 C or colder. The months of December, January and February are the coldest months of the Ottawa winter and it's difficult to avoid the cold weather. Frostbite is defined as damage of the skin from exposure to cold weather.

Look for the four signs of frostbite

1. Affected areas will look red, white, bluish-white, grayish-yellow, purplish, brown or ashen, depending on the severity of the condition and the person's usual skin color.
2. Affected areas will become painful.
3. White, waxy-feeling patches will appear. This means skin is dying.
4. Affected areas will then feel numb.

Tips to prevent frostbite

- Get to a warm area before frostbite sets in. If it's too cold outside, consider staying indoors.
- Keep extra mittens and gloves in the car, house or school bag.
- Wear larger sized mittens over your gloves.
- Wear a hat.
- Wear a neck warmer to protect the chin, lips and cheeks. They are all extremely susceptible to frostbite.
- Wear waterproof winter boots with room for an extra layer of socks. Wear two pairs of socks - wool if possible.
- Make sure you are able to wiggle your toes in your boots. This air space around your toes acts as insulation.
- Avoid drinking alcohol.



Should frostbite set-in...

- Do not rub or massage affected areas. It may cause more damage.
- NOT HOT - warm up the area slowly. Use a warm compresses or your own body heat to re-warm the area. Underarms are a good place.
- If toes or feet are frostbitten, try not to walk on them.
- Seek immediate medical attention if skin does not return to normal after being warmed up.

For more information including places to warm up, visit

[OttawaPublicHealth.ca/ColdWeather](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/ColdWeather)

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