

TIPS TO GROW BY

AKRON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

P1-12/05 SA505-07/05

Winter Safety



While some adults might consider winter a hardship to be endured, the season offers a wonderland of play for children. Sledding, ice skating and other activities are among many

kids' favorite pastimes. To make sure your children enjoy the season to its fullest, keep these safety measures in mind.

Frostbite and hypothermia

The extra time it takes to bundle up your child against the winter cold is not wasted. Hypothermia and frostbite can mean pain, permanent damage and even death to a child who is not properly dressed. Prevention is the best treatment!

Infants are particularly susceptible because they can't shiver, nature's first defense against the cold. If you have an infant outside in wintry weather, loosely cover the baby's face with a blanket to keep in warm air.

A mild case of overexposure to the cold can be treated at home with dry, warm clothing and bundling the child with warm blankets. Children with more serious cases should receive immediate medical attention.

Superficial or mild frostbite usually involves the ears, cheeks, tip of the nose, hands, fingers, soles of the feet and toes. It begins with a feeling of extreme cold or numbness, and white or yellowish-gray waxy patches on the skin. If the area is not immediately rewarmed, severe or deep frostbite may occur. To avoid more damage, keep the child out of the cold.

Warm the affected area using the child's body heat or your own. As the area rewarms, the site will become red and slightly swollen. It may blister. A scab may form and fall off a few days later, leaving no residual injury. Symptoms may persist for weeks.

Severe frostbite is literally frozen skin. Expanding ice crystals cut off the supply of oxygen and nutrients to skin cells. It commonly occurs to the nose, hands, fingers, feet and toes. The area first will turn numb, then become pale, waxy and firm.

Never rub frostbitten skin, especially not with snow! And never let a child walk on frostbitten feet.

If mild frostbite is suspected, call your child's doctor. Warming the tissue in tepid water (about 104 degrees) can begin at home. Use a thermometer to monitor water temperature; add warm water as needed. Keep the area in the water for 30 minutes.

Serious cases should be treated at a medical facility. Leave the frozen area alone and let the experts do the thawing. The child will feel extreme pain with intense itching, throbbing, burning or a pins-and-needles sensation. It may be several hours or even days before the degree of damage is known.

Hypothermia — which occurs when cold causes internal body temperatures to fall below a safe level — can lead to organ failure and death. Signs are uncontrollable shivering and slurred speech. Get medical attention immediately.

Dressing for winter

The severity of these winter hazards depends on temperature, duration of exposure, windchill factor, activity level and humidity. What your child wears also can make a difference.

Use several light layers of clothing to insulate the body with warm air. Cotton and wool blends "breathe," absorb sweat and keep the body drier; outside layers should be waterproof. Start with a cotton shirt, then add a light sweater, wind-repellent jacket, pants and boots. Avoid overdressing, which can cause sweating, and prickly heat and rashes. Remove wet clothes as soon as kids come inside.

Most body heat is lost through the head, so keep your child's head and ears covered, especially when the temperature is below freezing. Best choices: a hat that ties under the chin and has ear flaps or earmuffs. To prevent skin irritation from wool or synthetic hats, tie a cotton handkerchief around the head before donning the hat. Teeth are vulnerable, too, so cover the child's mouth with a scarf and teach kids to breathe through the nose when outdoors.

Don't let your child's hands go bare, especially when the temperature is below freezing. Mittens are better than gloves, because the fingers will warm each other. Attach mittens to coat sleeves with clips or elastic to make sure they don't get lost.

Make sure socks and shoes aren't too tight. Roomy, waterproof boots over heavy socks will keep a layer of warm, dry air around the feet.

Skiers should use goggles or sunglasses to ward off sun glare and wear sunscreens and moisturizers to protect their skin from sun exposure. Note: It's a good idea to take these precautions before any lengthy outdoor activity – no matter what the season.

Sledding safety

Supervision is the number-one way to prevent bruises, sprains, strains and broken bones caused by sleds, toboggans and snow disks. Watch the kids at play — or join in the fun yourself!

Check all equipment carefully before use. Look for secure handholds and sturdy, unbent parts; beware of splinters and sharp, hooked edges.

Before riding, inspect the terrain for snow-covered bumps, ruts, rocks, stumps, branches and other obstacles. Keep an eye out for ice, which reduces control and increases speed. On crowded sledding hills, be sure there's a separate route for returning up the hill, away from downhill riders.

Common sense should prevail, too. Don't allow sledding when it's dark, foggy or snowing hard, and **ban street sledding unless the streets have been officially closed to traffic.**

Ice skating

The best way to avoid the danger of falling through thin ice is to skate only at indoor rinks. Many rinks also offer professional skating instruction, a safety plus. Skating can be very demanding on underdeveloped bones and muscles, so check with your child's doctor before starting skating lessons. The physician also can recommend ankle-strengthening exercises.

Properly fitted ice skates will help prevent injury to feet, ankles and knees. Hockey players should have helmets, face masks, and padding on the hips, knees and ankles.

Winterproof your car

Your child might enjoy helping you assemble this survival kit to keep in the car for possible winter emergencies:

- Large plastic trash bags and food-storage bags. The large ones can be worn over coats for added warmth; cut slits for head and arms. Use smaller bags inside boots and over gloves.
- Shower caps to wear under a hat for extra warmth.
- Work gloves and old mismatched gloves to protect hands in case you have to open the hood of the car or change a tire.
- One or two heavy blankets.
- Energy foods, such as chocolate bars, peanuts and dried fruits.
- De-icer spray for frozen locks and lugs on wheels in case of a flat tire.
- A snow shovel, ice scraper and snow brush.
- A large bag of sand or cat litter for traction.
- Coins for phone calls.
- A flashlight and extra batteries.



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Your child's physician is an excellent source of information about this and other child health topics. This information is of a general nature and is not intended to serve as a substitute for the advice of a physician.

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