STAYING SAFE

WINDCHILL
It’s important that you also pay attention to the wind chill, which is how cold it actually feels.

- Generally lower than the actual air temperature, because blowing wind makes you feel colder.
- Often referred to as the “real feel” or “feels like” temperature.
- If the weather says that it is 40°F, but the wind chill is 25°F, dress for the colder weather and be sure to wear a wind resistant coat!

ICE
It just takes one wrong step on the ice to fall down and injure yourself.

- Take care when walking on the ice, though you should avoid it if possible.
- Snow provides more traction, though if you don’t know how deep the snow is, it can be a hazard on its own.
- Be careful if you are participating in an activity that involves you going out onto a frozen body of water. Ice that is less than four inches thick is dangerously thin and will not support walking.
- Avoid the area if you see puddles or cracks.

LAYERS
Layers are your best bet in the winter. By trapping warm air between them you stay warmer for longer.

- Instead of wearing a long-sleeved tee shirt and a pair of jeans, try a tank or undershirt, a sweater, and a jacket over that, and wear tall socks or long underwear under your jeans.
- Wearing the proper footwear. Insulated and waterproof boots are going to keep you warmest in the winter.
- Wear a waterproof jacket on top of everything else. Being wet and cold is not only miserable, but can lead to hypothermia and frostbite.

ALCOHOL
You may feel warm after a couple of drinks, but your blood vessels dilate when you’re drinking and you actually lose heat faster than you would otherwise.

- More blood flowing through your veins means that more blood is nearer to the surface of your skin, which is where you’ll lose the most heat. Your skin may even feel warm to the touch, but your internal organs will lose heat to your skin and the cool air if you don’t take care to protect yourself.
- If you’ve had a few drinks and the next party isn’t that far away, wear a jacket. You don’t want to get frostbite or hypothermia.
- Alcohol relaxes your inhibitions and contributes to increased clumsiness. If you decide to walk home from a bar instead of taking the bus, you may underestimate how long you’ll experience the cold conditions, possibly resulting in hypothermia.

HYDRATION
Staying hydrated is just as important in the winter as it is in the summer, especially if you participate in winter sports.

- You still lose water when you physically exert yourself, and you could end up dehydrated if you don’t replenish your fluids.
- Staying hydrated can actually keep you warmer, too. If you are well hydrated, your blood is taking up more volume in your body. The more blood you have, the longer it will take to cool. Hydration, then, may help prevent frostbite.
**ACCESSORIES**
You lose a lot of heat through your head and mouth, so wear a hat and cover up your face with a scarf.

- That being said, noses, ears, fingers, and toes are also particularly prone to frostbite in cold weather.
- Wear wool socks and waterproof, wool- or synthetic-lined boots.
- Mittens are warmer than gloves, and a hat that covers your ears is going to keep you warmer than a pair of earmuffs.

**SUNGLASSES**
The sun may not be as warm or long-lasting as it is in the summer, but it’s rays are just as harmful to your eyes (and skin) in the winter.

- While this is especially important if there is snow or ice on the ground (the white reflects a large portion of the rays back up to eye level), it’s important on any clear day that you plan to spend time outside.
- If you plan on skiing, sledding, or otherwise participating in winter sports, beware of snow blindness. This painful condition occurs when your corneas get sunburned after exposure to the sun’s rays or their reflection.
- Save yourself the suffering and invest in a good pair of sunglasses or ski goggles.

**WINTER DRIVING**
You should learn the basics of winter driving ahead of time so that you don’t get caught in a storm without knowing what to do.

- Keep your car in top shape for winter driving: properly inflated tires, a full tank of gas and functioning lights and windshield wipers.
- When go out, practice cautious, slow driving. Speeding up and slowing down abruptly can lead to skidding and will take longer in wet, snowy conditions than on a normal day.
- Start slowing down well in advance of stop signs or traffic lights; you don’t want to end up rear-ending anyone just because you were in a hurry.
- Hills can be tricky in the snow. Slick conditions can lead to you sliding one way or another and don’t want to go too quickly; you might lose traction on your way up the hill if you hit the gas, and you don’t know what conditions await on the downslope.
- Always drive with your lights on in snowy, rainy, or stormy conditions, regardless of the time of day.

**WHAT TO WATCH FOR**

**COLD-RELATED ILLNESSES ARE LIFE THREATENING. SEEK MEDICAL HELP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

**HYPOTHERMIA.** In cold temperatures you begin to lose heat faster than you can produce it. Prolonged exposure to cold may result in hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperatures that drop too low affect the brain an make it difficult to think clearly or move quickly. Hypothermia is dangerous because you may not know it’s occurring until it’s too late.

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS.**

- People with mild hypothermia may shiver; feel nauseated, hungry, or tired; or experience fast breathing or an increased heart rate.
- People who are experiencing severe hypothermia may stop shivering, become confused, try to take off warm clothing, become fatigued, lose consciousness, and exhibit a weak pulse and weak breathing. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

**TREATMENT.**
If an individual has gotten wet, all wet clothing must be removed. Then, regardless of the circumstances in which hypothermia began, individuals should be brought inside, put on a warm surface (not the ground, which will contribute to them losing more heat), and covered with blankets or dry clothes. Skin-to-skin contact may help warm up an individual suffering from hypothermia.

**FROST BITE.** Frostbite can be a side effect of hypothermia, or it can occur on its own when patches of skin (typically on the face, hands, and feet) and the tissue beneath the skin get extremely cold and begin to freeze. Though frostbite often occurs when skin is directly exposed to cold weather, it can occur despite wearing mittens or scarves if the temperature is cold enough, if it’s cold and wet, or there is enough wind. Frostbite can result in tissue loss.

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS.**

- Skin may feel numb, tingly, or like “pins and needles.”
- The frostbitten area may turn red, white, blue, grey, or yellow and become hard.
- Severe frostbite may result in blisters and the tissues in the affected area may die, leaving the skin black.

**TREATMENT.**
Treatment for frostbite first involves getting away from freezing conditions. If you suspect that you have frostbite and are in a warm area, you can gently rewarm the affected body parts. Do not immerse them in hot water; you will burn yourself. If your frostbite is mild, you may experience pain as the tissue is rewarmed. If you develop blisters on the skin, remain in pain after the tissue has returned to body temperature, or if you never regain feeling in the affected area, go to the emergency room.