

STAY WARM – PREVENT HYPOTHERMIA

Maine CDC/DHHS 2008-2009

The Problem

- With many needing to keep the heat turned down this winter, people may be at risk for cold body temperature, also known as hypothermia.
- About 750 deaths occur due to hypothermia every year in the U.S.
- An average of 20 Mainers die every year due to hypothermia, including about 3-4 who die in their homes.
- High risk populations include people who:
 - Are >60 years of age, who account for more than half of all hypothermia deaths (they do not shiver or constrict peripheral blood vessels as well and have lower metabolic rates)
 - Are infants (babies under 1 year of age)
 - Have hypothyroidism
 - Drink or abuse alcohol (alcohol results in vasodilation, a relaxation of blood vessels causing heat loss)
 - Have a mental illness
 - Are homeless, poor, and/or live alone
 - Take sedative hypnotics (such as benzodiazepines, chloral hydrate, antihistamines such as diphenhydramine=Benadryl)
 - Take neuroleptic medications (also known as antipsychotics, and include phenothiazines, haloperidol, loxapine, clozapine, zyprexa), which induce vasodilation and reduce shivering responses.

What You Can Do

- Dress in layers.
- Wear a warm hat – 30% of heat loss is through the head.
- Wear a scarf and gloves.
- Infants should be in a room in which the temperature is 61-68 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Drink plenty of fluids and warm/hot drinks.
- Eat regular balanced meals to give you energy – good nutrition is important.
- Keep active when it's cold, but not to the point where you're sweating.
- Keep dry and change out of wet clothes as soon as possible.
- Cut down on alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine, since all three cause heat loss.
- Try to keep one room in the house warm.
- Ask your doctor if you are on any medications that affect your ability to maintain a steady body temperature (such as neuroleptic medications and sedative hypnotics).
- Symptoms of hypothermia include:
 - Decreased consciousness, sleepiness, confusion, and/or disorientation
 - Someone who is mildly hypothermic may not take action to warm themselves
 - Shivering, pale or blue skin, numbness, poor coordination, slurred speech
 - In severe hypothermia, shivering decreases or goes away, and the person becomes unconscious and has very shallow breaths.

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Maine Governor's Stay Safe and Warm Website

http://www.maine.gov/governor/baldacci/contact/citizen_services/safeandwarm.html

211 Maine

<http://www.211maine.org/>

US CDC Review Article on Hypothermia Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001319.htm>