

Winter Safety Tips

Winter brings snow, cold temperatures, and great outdoor activities. Keeping children healthy and safe during the winter is of great importance. Hypothermia, frostbite, and winter sports and activities safety are a special concern during the winter months.

Hypothermia develops when a person's temperature falls below normal due to exposure to low temperatures, wind, and moisture over a period of time. It can happen on the ski hill, in a car, falling in water that is cold, or being outdoors in extremely cold weather without wearing proper clothing. As hypothermia sets in, a person may shiver uncontrollably, become lethargic and clumsy, and their speech may become slurred. If you suspect someone is hypothermic, get the person to a warm, dry place as soon as possible, remove wet clothing, wrap in blankets or warm clothes, and call 911 at once. **NEVER RUB THE SKIN.**

Frostbite happens when the skin and outer tissues become frozen. This condition tends to happen on extremities, fingers, toes, ears, and nose. They become pale, gray, and blistered. At the same time the person may complain their skin burns or has become numb. If frostbite occurs, bring the person indoors and place the frostbitten area in warm (not hot) water. Warm washcloths may be applied to frostbitten nose, ears, and lips. **DO NOT RUB EFFECTED AREAS.** Seek medical attention immediately.

Winter sports and activities such as ice skating, sledding, skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling require special safety precautions.

Ice Skating

- Allow children to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local police or recreation departments, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved.
- Advise your child to: skate in the same direction as the crowd; avoid darting across the ice; never skate alone; not chew gum or eat candy while skating.

Sledding

- Keep sledders away from motor vehicles.
- Children should be supervised.
- Keep young children separated from older children.
- Sledding feet first or sitting up, instead of lying down head-first, may prevent head injuries.
- Use steerable sleds, not snow disks or inner tubes.
- Sleds should be structurally sound and free of sharp edges and splinters, and the steering mechanism should be well lubricated.
- Sled slopes should be free of obstructions like fire hydrants or fences, be covered in snow not ice, not be too steep (slope of less than 30°), and end with a flat runoff.
- Avoid sledding in overcrowded areas.

Snow Skiing and Snowboarding

- Children should be taught to ski or snowboard by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children.

- Never ski or snowboard alone. Young children should always be supervised by an adult. Older children's need for supervision depends on their maturity and skill.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under age 7 not snowboard.
- Consider wearing a helmet.
- Equipment should fit the child. Skiers should wear safety bindings that are adjusted at least every year. Snowboarders should wear gloves with built-in wrist guards.
- Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder. Avoid overcrowded slopes.

Sun Protection

- The sun's rays can still cause sunburn in the winter, especially when they reflect off snow. Make sure to cover your child's exposed skin with sunscreen.

Snowmobiling

- The AAP recommends that children under age 16 not operate snowmobiles and that children under age 6 never ride on snowmobiles.
- Do not use a snowmobile to pull a sled or skiers.
- Wear goggles and a safety helmet approved for use on motorized vehicles like motorcycles.
- Travel at safe speeds.
- Never use alcohol or other drugs before or during snowmobiling.
- Never snowmobile alone.
- Stay on marked trails, away from roads, water, railroads and pedestrians.

We hope these winter safety tips help make your winter season happy and healthy. For more information on these topics you may go to:

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/decwintertips.htm>