

Recognize Cold Stress

Three stages of hypothermia every worker and supervisor should know — before the body shuts down.

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STAGE 1

Mild Hypothermia

WARNING SIGNS

- Shivering — often uncontrollable
- Cold, pale or numb extremities
- Loss of coordination — the "umbles" (stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, grumbles)
- Fatigue and mild confusion

WHAT TO DO

Move worker to a warm, dry area. Remove wet clothing and replace with dry layers. Give warm, sweet beverages — no alcohol or caffeine. Wrap in blankets and monitor for at least 30 minutes.

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STAGE 2

Moderate Hypothermia

WARNING SIGNS

- Shivering slows or stops
- Pale or bluish skin
- Slurred speech, slowed thinking
- Slow, shallow breathing · weak pulse
- Drowsiness, loss of fine motor control

CALL 911 · WARM THE CORE

Treat as a medical emergency. Move to warmth. Remove wet clothing. Wrap head and torso first — warm the core, not the limbs. Do not rub skin. If conscious and alert, sip warm sweet fluids. Handle gently — rough movement can trigger cardiac arrest.

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STAGE 3

Severe Hypothermia

WARNING SIGNS

- No shivering — body has lost the ability
- Loss of consciousness
- Rigid muscles · dilated pupils
- Very slow or absent pulse and breathing
- May appear dead

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY

This is life-threatening. Begin CPR if no pulse or breathing. Move gently — handle as little as possible. Do not give fluids. Do not apply direct heat to limbs. Insulate the worker and keep them horizontal until EMS arrives.

Prevent cold stress — Layer · Dry · Fuel · Watch



Dress in layers

Inner wicking layer, insulating middle layer, wind- and water-resistant outer shell. Cover head, hands, and feet.



Mind the wind chill

Wind chill is more dangerous than air temperature alone. At ≤ -18°F wind chill, frostbite can occur in 30 minutes or less.



Eat and hydrate warm

Schedule warm, high-calorie meals and warm sweet drinks during breaks. Avoid alcohol — it accelerates heat loss.



Use the buddy system

Pair workers in cold conditions. Schedule heavier work in the warmest part of the day and shorten exposure as temps drop.