

Cold Warnings: protecting yourself in cold weather

Cold winters are a reality in Canada and many Canadians have learned to embrace this time of year with fun outdoor activities like tobogganing, skating and skiing. However, staying warm and safe during this time of year can sometimes be a challenge. Learn how to prevent cold-related health injuries and prepare for cold-weather emergencies.

Sign up for Halton Region cold warnings

To alert residents to cold weather conditions that can affect their health, the Halton Region Health Department will issue a cold warning when one of the following weather conditions are forecast for Halton:

- A daily predicted low of -15 degrees Celsius without wind-chill
- Environment Canada issues an Extreme Cold Warning for outdoor activity (when the temperature or wind chill is expected to reach -30 degrees Celsius for at least two hours)
- Extreme weather conditions, such as a blizzard or ice storm

To sign up and receive automatic cold warnings, visit halton.ca/cold.

What is wind chill?

Wind chill is the cooling sensation your body feels when the air temperature is combined with wind speed.

Are you at risk during cold weather?

Anyone can be affected by extreme cold-related weather conditions, depending on length of exposure and outdoor activity levels. Those especially at risk include:

- adults over the age of 65
- infants and young children
- people who work outdoors
- people who exercise outdoors (hikers, skiers)
- people who have limited resources to house or protect themselves

How to prevent cold-related injury

- Frostbite can occur within minutes, so dress appropriately when going outside. Cover up all exposed skin using multiple layers of loose-fitting clothes with a wind-resistant outer layer, a hat, mittens, and scarf.
- If you get wet, change into dry clothing as soon as possible. You lose heat faster when you're wet.
- Drink warm fluids – but NO alcohol or caffeinated beverages, as they cause your body to lose heat faster.
- Keep moving – especially your hands and feet.
- Take shelter from the wind to reduce wind chill exposure.
- Keep your vehicle well-maintained.
- Prepare emergency kits for your home and car.
- Always be on the lookout for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Plan ahead and check the weather forecast!
- Sign up for automatic cold alerts at

halton.ca/cold



What are cold-related injuries?

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas, most often the body parts furthest from the heart: hands, feet, nose, and ears. At the first sign of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin, as frostbite may be setting in.

If you suspect that frostbite has set in:

- Get to a warm room as soon as possible.
- Wrap yourself in blankets or reheat your body by skin-to-skin contact with another person.
- Use underarms to warm hands if needed.
- Place injured skin in warm – **not** hot – water because thawing frostbitten skin is very painful.
- Do not rub, massage or shake the injured skin because this can cause more damage.
- If toes or feet are frostbitten, try not to walk on them, unless it is absolutely necessary.

Severe frostbite can cause serious health complications if not treated immediately. **If you notice any of the following symptoms you should seek medical advice:**

- a white or grayish-yellow skin area
- skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- numbness

Hypothermia happens when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. There are three stages of hypothermia progressing from mild (shivering, goosebumps) to more severe symptoms (difficulty speaking, thinking and walking).

Hypothermia is a medical emergency.

Call 911 immediately if you suspect that someone may have hypothermia.

While waiting for help:

- move them to a warm place, if you can
- gently remove any wet clothing
- use several layers of blankets and warm the person gradually
- give them sweet and warm beverages if they are alert

Don't fight shivering. This is one of the ways the body increases its core temperature!

How can I prepare my home and car for winter?

Home: Make sure your heating system is working efficiently and seal all cracks and drafts. Keep at least three days' supply of food (needing no cooking or refrigeration), water (stored in clean containers or purchased) and medicines.

Car: Make sure you keep booster cables, vehicle fluids, emergency flares, a survival candle, blanket, first aid kit and a highway help sign in your car.

For more information and emergency preparedness checklists for your home and car visit:

halton.ca/beprepared

For more information about how to protect yourself or to sign up to receive automatic cold alerts, visit halton.ca/cold or dial 311.