

Cold Weather Hazards

All parts of New York State can experience harsh weather conditions and with the onset of winter, temperatures will be falling. Those of us who spend time outside in the cold weather on the job, clearing snow from the driveway, or enjoying winter sports, need to appreciate the hazards. To stay safe you need to be prepared. Start by paying attention to and understanding local weather forecasts. Be sure to dress for the expected conditions with layers that can go off and on as conditions and your level of activity change. As appropriate bring along a thermos of coffee or tea or a similar hot, non-alcoholic beverage. You can quickly become dehydrated in dry winter air. Finally, be prepared for the unexpected. Stow extra warm clothing and jackets, flares, and flashlights in your car. A breakdown on a back road could be life threatening.

Serious illness can result from spending time in cold temperatures. Wind and the resulting wind chill can profoundly increase the danger of cold weather. Frostbite is caused by freezing of the skin and can occur rapidly under cold, windy conditions. While frostbite is localized to exposed skin, hypothermia affects the whole body and results from the loss of body heat. Hypothermia can occur at relatively mild temperatures under wet windy conditions.

To avoid serious consequences from exposure to cold weather, wear appropriate clothing, limit your time outside and adjust your schedule and activities to prevailing conditions. (12/2/11)