



Mansfield/Ontario/Richland County Health Department

January 3, 2012

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM HYPOTHERMIA

With cold weather expected throughout January, including evening temperatures in the teens, the Health Department is reminding Richland County residents to be aware of hypothermia (dangerously low body temperature).

Hypothermia occurs when more heat escapes from your body than your body can produce. Signs and symptoms of hypothermia may include gradual loss of mental and physical abilities. Severe hypothermia can lead to death.

For most people, hypothermia isn't a serious risk. Still, each year nearly 700 people in the United States die of hypothermia. Common causes are prolonged exposure to cold air or water temperatures.

When you're outdoors enjoying such activities as camping, hunting, ice fishing, and skiing, be aware of weather conditions and whether you or others with you are wet and cold. If you get cold and wet, move indoor and get warm and dry early — before you develop hypothermia.

Hypothermia usually occurs gradually. Often, people aren't aware that they need help, much less medical attention. Common signs to look for are shivering, which is your body's attempt to generate heat through muscle activity, and the "-umbles": Stumbles, Mumbles, Fumbles, Grumbles. These behaviors may be a result of changes in consciousness and motor coordination caused by hypothermia. Other hypothermia symptoms may include: slurred speech; abnormally slow rate of breathing; cold, pale skin; fatigue, lethargy or apathy. Persons exhibiting these symptoms need medical attention immediately.

Children are at greater risk for hypothermia than adults. Children lose heat more rapidly through their skin than adults and hypothermia in children can occur in temperatures as high as 40 degree F. This is especially true if clothing is wet or the weather is windy.

Senior citizens may be at risk due to normal age-related changes that can make it harder to feel when they are getting cold. Medical conditions and certain prescription medications can affect body heat or reduce blood flow putting seniors at greater risk for hypothermia. Even some over-the-counter medications such as cold remedies can cause problems.

Before you or the people you are responsible for step out into cold air, remember the advice that follows with the simple acronym COLD — cover, overexertion, layers, dry:

- **Cover.** Wear a hat or other protective covering to prevent body heat from escaping from your head, face and neck. Cover your hands with mittens instead of gloves. Mittens are more effective than gloves are because mittens keep your fingers in closer contact with one another.
- **Overexertion.** Avoid activities that would cause you to sweat a lot. The combination of wet clothing and cold weather can give you chills.
- **Layers.** Wear loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Outer clothing made of tightly woven, water-repellent material is best for wind protection. Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers hold more body heat than cotton does.
- **Dry.** Stay as dry as possible. In the winter, pay special attention