

# Hypothermia FAQs for Workers Exposed to Cold Stress



Educate workers about deadly hypothermia hazards.

## 8 FAQs about Hypothermia

**Introduction:** The human body functions normally at a 'core' temperature of 36°C /98.6°F. If your core body temperature drops too low it can lead to cold stress, the most dangerous form of which is called **HYPOTHERMIA**. If you work in cold conditions, you may be at risk of hypothermia, which can cause serious injury and even death. Here are 8 FAQs you need to know to protect yourself and others against the danger, both at and away from work.

### 1. What Hypothermia Is

A condition in which core body temperature drops below the normal body temperature of 36°C/98.6°F.

### 2. Why Hypothermia Is Dangerous

When your body temperature gets too low, your body can't replenish the heat it loses and thus can't carry out its normal functions.

### **3. How Hypothermia Happens**

It's usually the result of exposure to low temperatures and other risk factors, including wind chill, wet and damp conditions, contact with cold surfaces, physical or metabolic challenges, lack of proper clothing and lack of education. Alcohol consumption and dehydration also increase hypothermia risks.

### **4. Who's At Risk of Hypothermia**

Those who work in cold temperatures, either indoors or outdoors, especially those who drink alcohol before or during work.

### **5. How to Prevent Hypothermia**

By doing at least 4 things:

1. Drinking plenty of liquids (but not alcoholic beverages);
2. Wearing adequate protective clothing, including a hat, scarf, long-sleeved shirt, mittens (which are warmer than gloves), water-resistant coat and shoes, layers of loose-fitting clothing;
3. Staying dry and removing/replacing clothing as it gets wet; and
4. Avoiding prolonged exposure to cold conditions.

### **6. How to Recognize Hypothermia ' Signs and symptoms**

Signs and symptoms include:

- Involuntary, excessive shivering;
- Confusion;
- Drowsiness;
- Slurred speech;
- Irrational behavior;
- Falling to the ground;
- Inability to walk;
- Curling up;
- Paling of the skin;
- Dilated pupils; and
- Decreased pulse rate.

## 7. How to Treat Hypothermia

7 things to help yourself or a victim who may have hypothermia:

1. Move the victim to a warmer environment;
2. Remove wet clothing;
3. Place the victim on a blanket or a warm surface, insulating the body from the cold ground, and wrap in blankets or other warming material;
4. Apply warm compresses to the center of the body, the chest, neck, head and groin;
5. Call for medical aid immediately;
6. Provide warm beverages that don't contain alcohol, such as hot chocolate; and
7. Share body heat.

## 8. How Not to Treat Hypothermia

Yes, 5 things you should **not** do to treat hypothermia:

1. Don't apply direct heat, such as hot water or a heating pad;

2. Don't attempt to warm the arms and legs as this can cause cold blood to be forced back toward the heart, lungs and brain;
3. Don't massage or rub the person. People suffering from hypothermia must be handled gently as they're at risk of cardiac arrest;
4. Don't give the person an alcoholic beverage, which lowers the body's ability to retain heat; and
5. Don't try to give any beverage to a person who's unconscious.